

“LITTLE THINGS WITH BIG MEANING: V – POTTERY”

Karen F. Bunnell  
Elkton United Methodist Church  
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Memorial Day Weekend

Psalm 139:1 -

Jeremiah 18:1-4

I was talking to someone in the church the other day who commented to me that she and her husband had had to cancel a trip they were going to take to Niagara Falls this summer. She lamented how sad she was because she's never been there before – to which I replied that I have probably been there at least five times – probably because our family lived in New York and a lot of family still lives there. It's a breathtaking experience to see those falls, and if you haven't been there, I highly recommend you planning a trip sometime when this pandemic finally clears up.

On the way to the Falls from Ithaca – where my mother grew up and where we spent our summer vacations – you pass by towns like Elmira and Corning. Elmira was the summer home to Mark Twain and there are a number of “Twain” sites to see there. And then, in Corning, you can visit the headquarters of Corning Glass Works. That, too, is a great place to visit.

One of the most special things about visiting there is being able to watch glass blowers at work. It is fascinating to see. Working behind a great wall of glass, you see the glass blowers adorned in protective gear with a long pole in their hands, on the end of which is a red hot, glaring blob of material. They immediately sit down, lay the pole in a notch on a bench, and start to roll the pole back and forth, working the material. Every once in a while they put the material, which has hardened somewhat, back into the fire, to make it more malleable once again.

It's a slow, deliberate process, and over the course of time, as the glassblower uses tools like pliers and pinchers, he or she creates something beautiful – sometimes a vase, sometimes a bird, sometimes a flower. It is amazing to watch the glassblower see something inside of that glowing blob of hot material and bring it to life. And it is amazing to see the care with which they do it.

You know, most acts of creation are like that. The creators – whoever they may be – glassblowers, composers, knitters, quilters, wood carvers – whatever – have a deep respect for the material with which they're working, and a passion for bringing it to life. Some of you may remember last year when I highlighted some of the artists here in our church – like Charlotte Mehosky, Andee McKenica, Barton Funke and more. Each of them have that deep love and respect for their medium,

each of them seems to be able to see something deep within it as they create something new.

Well, at the center of today's lesson from Jeremiah is a creator, actually the Creator – God – portrayed as a potter at his wheel, who has this kind of love and respect for his creation. One pastor put it this way: “The potter has an intimate relationship with the clay. The potter touches, shapes, smooths, works, corrects, enjoys the clay. You can tell that when you watch a potter at work. Same with someone who loves to work with wood – you can tell they love it. The feel, the smell. Or those who dig in the dirt and garden, or who work with fabric . . . ever notice people who feel fabric? (she writes). It's a love of the stuff. The potter is like that with the clay. Not removed from it, loves it, enjoys it. I like that image for God (she continues). God does not deal with us at arm's length, but is intimately involved in the life of the world.” (On-line, “The Potter and the Clay”)

This is not the first time in holy scripture that God is likened to a potter. It actually shows up very early, way back in Genesis, when we're told that God reached down into the clay, the dirt of the earth, and created Adam from it. God, the Creator, God, the Master Potter. And what did God say after he had created Adam and Eve – God said, “It is good.”

God loves what God creates, with a love that never ends. God sees us as things of beauty, as an artist sees the things with which they work, the things they create. We matter to God, by his hands we have, as we heard in Psalm 139 earlier, been “fearfully and wonderfully made by him.” God loves us with an intimacy and a commitment that has no end.

Jeremiah talks about how even when, in his words “we have become spoiled” God still loves us and stays with us, reworking us to be the people he wants us to be. He never gives up on us, no matter what.

If you’ve lived any length of time at all, you know that indeed, sometimes we do become spoiled, we do become misshapen, if you will, we fall away from who God created us to be. Most often it happens because of sin. Most often it happens because we fall away from our relationship with God, we fall away from keeping his commandments, we fall away from living the way we know we should live, and doing the things we know we should do.

In the next few lines of scripture following this morning’s passage in Jeremiah, he talks about just that, about how Israel has fallen away from being the

people God created them to be. They have taken their eyes off of God and fallen into the ways of the world, and God is calling them into account, telling them to get right again.

So too does he call all of us into account. All of us know that we have sinned and fallen short, but it takes more than just knowing it. God calls us to do something about it, to turn to him, change our ways, give ourselves over to his reshaping us, remolding us. It means giving up control, and giving it over to him.

The good news is that if we do, God waits with open arms to make us new. That's what he wants for us. He's not a vengeful parent just waiting to pounce on a sinful child, rather God is a loving parent mourning our unfaithfulness, waiting for us to turn to him so that he, like the father of the prodigal son, can wrap his arms around us, and with his tender hands, reshape us, remold us into something new.

Do you remember that old story about a speaker at a seminar holding up a fresh new \$20 bill in front of the 200 participants in the room and asking, "How many of you would like this \$20 bill?" and hands went up all over the room. Then, the speaker said, "I'm going to give it to one of you, but before I do . . ." and then he

crumbled it up into a little ball. “Now,” he asked the audience, “how many of you still want it?” Again, hands went up all over the room. “Well, what if I do this?” and he took the crumbled \$20 bill, threw it down and stepped on it, grinding it into the floor with his foot. Then he picked it up and held it up for all to see. It was crumpled and smudged and dirty. “Who wants it now?” Still, hands went up all over the room. The speaker looked at the crowd and said, “You’ve all just learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value.”

The one who told this story finished with this: “Many times in our lives we get knocked around, dropped, crumbled, smudged, ground into the dirt – by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. And sometimes we feel we are worthless and used up and of no account. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value in God’s eyes. To God, dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are still priceless!” (James W. Moore, *If God has a Refrigerator, Your Picture Is on It*, “Celebrating God’s Healing Love,” p. 87)

And, I would add, the God who created you that way, waits to remold you and reshape you into the precious being he made you to be. He wants to do that even

when the reason you've become misshapen, out of sync with who he created you to be, is because of your own sin.

He also waits to hold you in his hands when you've become broken because of something life brought your way, not of your own doing. When you're broken because of illness. When you're broken, because of heartbreak. When you're broken, because, well, a pandemic came along and stole your life, your livelihood away from you. When you're broken, because this pandemic leaves you in a constant state of fear and foreboding. When you're broken, because of, well, you fall in the blank. Things in life come along and break us, leave cracks in us, and even then, God, the Great Potter, does some of his best work.

I'm reminded of a story out of India about a cracked pot. It's the story of a Water Bearer who had two large pots, each of which hung on the end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years, this went on daily, with the bearer only delivering one and one half pots of water to his master's house.

Well, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made, but the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its imperfections, and miserable that it was only able to accomplish half of what it had been made to do. It felt like a bitter failure, and one day, it spoke to the water bearer, telling the water bearer how ashamed it was and apologizing for failing.

The Water Bearer felt badly for the old cracked pot, and with compassion said, “The next time we return to the master’s house, notice the beautiful flowers along the path, and notice on which side of the path they’re growing. They’re only growing on your side of the path. I’ve always known about your flaw, but I took advantage of it, rather than looked down on it. Without you being the way you are, the master wouldn’t have this beauty to grace his home.” (On-line, “The Cracked Pot,” author unknown)

Oh friends, even when life breaks us and we have cracks, even then God reshapes us, remolds us, uses us to be the best we can be. You know, it’s been said that there’s a crack in everything and everyone – that’s how the light gets in. What good news for all of us, that we don’t have to be perfect, for its in our imperfections that God’s light gets in, and God works to make us just the way he wants us to be.



Friends, I hope that this image of God as the potter, and all of us as the ones being created and re-created is a comforting one for you today. I hope remembering that God's loving, creative hands are always ready to surround you – to hold you and mold you and never leave you alone – is comforting, especially in these tough days of so much discomfort. I hope it gives you courage, if you find yourself today lost in sin or not being the person you know God created you to be, to turn to him, confess to him, and allow him to reshape you and put you right.

Most of all, I hope this image of God as the Great Potter, will encourage all of us to daily pray in the words that Laurie sang for us a little while ago:

“Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way,  
Thou art the potter, I am the clay.  
Mold me and make me, after thy will,  
While I am waiting, yielded and still.”

May it be so.

Amen.

