

“God the Potter”

Psalm 139, Jeremiah 18: 1-11

9/8/13

Rev. Joy R. Haertig

Recently I hosted a movie night at church where we watched “Jeff Who lives at Home”. The movie began with Jeff (at home) receiving a phone call for a “Kevin”. It was a wrong number but it triggered in Jeff a day long search for “Kevin” – he was sure this call was not simply random but was a “sign” – that it had meaning for his day and his life so he left the house in search of “Kevin”. (A great movie – and sure enough, a Kevin did come into his life and it was quite significant!)

The Prophet Jeremiah, a bit of a Jeff – Nudged by God to go down to the Potters house to watch him with his clay.

No clue as to why – just went

Heard –saw a message as he watched him with the clay

The first pot didn’t work – clay was spoiled – he started over again.

Jeremiah saw a HUGE message from GOD in that process –

Prophets find God messages right in the midst of DAILY LIVING – Prophets believe that Life provides illustrations of the Divine Word and their job is to PROCLAIM the Divine message to anyone who will listen.

(That’s what Prophets do ---that is their job, they are inspired teachers who proclaim the will of God. Of course everyone may not agree on whether someone is really a Prophet or not)

A Prophets job was not to “make nice” either ---their job was to proclaim it as they saw it ---both the good, bad and the ugly...(Most prophets did not want this job – it picked them rather than them picking it)

In today’s reading Jeremiah is definitely not “making nice” – where’s the love?

Jeremiah watches the Potter as he tries to make a pot and then when it doesn’t work he squishes it and starts over again.

The Potter is in charge.

The Potter has power over the clay to do what he wants.

For Jeremiah – there is God’s message – God is the Potter – God tries to shape the nation of Israel into a useful, God-shaped “Pot” but they refuse to work with God so he prepares to squish them and start over again.

For Jeremiah YHWH is both Creator and Punisher.

For Jeremiah YHWH’s greatest desire is to be Creator – to be the Shaper – the Potter, not the punisher – but God will be the punisher if the people refuse to allow God to shape the living of their days.

I can hear Jeremiah’s words – I can hear a prophecy that contains deep love and agony on the part of God who longs for all creation to live towards the good rather than the greedy ---and I can hear Jeremiah’s theology – his understanding of God as being in charge of everything – just like the Potter at the wheel...

And even as we need to consider the cry of the Prophet – I do not believe that it is God that crushes or punishes us for the ways we refuse the hand of the Potter. I do not believe in a theology that promotes a God that rewards us for good and punishes us for bad.

The consequences of our greedy and ignorant choices are punishments in themselves and they are not delivered by God’s hands.

We human beings have the ability to be incredibly thoughtless and act often out of absurd and even violent selfishness or ignorance, with absolutely dire consequences – but it is not God that creates the consequences as punishment.

God does not and cannot control EVERYTHING ---As someone else has said before - God’s heart is the first to break, God is not the breaker.

Whether we will take action against Syria is on the minds of all of us. I heard Pope Francis was quoted as saying “we have perfected our weapons but our conscious has fallen to sleep.”

The use of chemical weapons in Syria was due to the sleeping conscious of human beings– the consequences of innocent children and bystanders being killed are on human shoulders, not God’s.

The illnesses we face – the conflicts we endure – the environmental crisis – these are not God's punishment for our stubbornness – they are consequences of our actions – our ignorance – our short-sightedness or the short sightedness of our ancestors.

The poet who wrote Psalm 139 describes a God that has shaped us in our mother's wombs. A God that knows us – that knows when we lie down and when we rise up...A God that Loves us like a parent loves a child.

A God that keeps working with the clay of humanity in all our brokenness to keep trying to mold and shape us into the vision God has had since the beginning of time, of a world where the lion will lay down with the lamb.

God is present like the Potter at the wheel – but not in complete control of the ingredients he/she/it is working with any more than the human potter is in absolute complete control of every aspect of the clay!

We humans push away, as nations – as individuals – as the church - we become hard and crusty – like clay we are too wet or too dry – we do what we want because we can – we deny our interdependency and our mutual responsibility to shape a world in love rather than fear.

Jeremiah's message and the Potter metaphor is still a vivid one for us today.

It is sad that even after all the pleading and threatening that Jeremiah speaks on behalf of God - the last verse we heard reads: "But they say, 'It is no use! We will follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of our own evil will.'"

It is not easy to seek the ways of God in our living.

It is not easy to be mindful or even understand what it means to let God's hands shape the living of our days like a Potter at the wheel and yet our very survival as a species depends on our willingness to try.

God has set us free to seek God's ways or not to...

God has set us free to perfect our walk towards peace or to perfect the building of weapons ---

As Christian people we find guidance and inspiration in Jesus who was willingly shaped by the Potter.

I'd like to invite you to imagine yourself as a potter this morning –

Take and hold the clay in your hands – warm it...Let your fingers and your heart – not your brain – consider the choice we have to let God's ways shape our lives – our personal lives...our church life...the life of our nation...Ask the Spirit to anoint your hands...I invite you to see what shape might come forth as I share with you the prayer of St. Francis:

*(Idea came from The Spiritual Formation Bible)*

Let us pray... Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.