

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Who Is In The Potter's Seat?

Jeremiah 18:1-6

Sunday, May 21, 2023

Rev. Philip Galyon

Growing up, I was a United Methodist pastor's kid and I moved around a lot. One of my most unique stops occurred during the time my father was the pastor at Gatlinburg First United Methodist Church in Gatlinburg, TN. My mom worked at an art studio in Gatlinburg. Her work was literally 50 feet from my elementary school so most days after school, I would walk to her work. She learned the art of Stained Glass and Polymer clay while she was there, but her studio had a full-blown pottery wheel and that's what caught my eye the most. I remember looking at the resident potter shaping and molding beautiful masterpieces that included intricacies my 8 year old mind couldn't comprehend. I was eager to learn and Sean, the resident potter, allowed me to spin the pottery wheel and try to mold a piece of pottery. It went as well as you might think - wet clay everywhere! From then on, I gained a different appreciation for artists of any kind.

While preparing for this message today, I was reminded of Sean's work. The grace and care he took with his creations were apparent. Likewise, God, our potter, our creator, takes the utmost care and precision when it comes to molding and shaping our lives into ones of grace, hope, and love; a life that God calls us to not take for granted; a life that helps us use our voices for good, no matter where we go.

A few moments ago, we heard the words of Jeremiah the prophet. Jeremiah was called by God to deliver messages to those in Judea. When the Babylonians destroyed Israel in 586 BC, Isaiah went North and Jeremiah went South to the land of Judah to help restore and weep (that was his name, the weeping prophet) with those who had lost everything in the Babylonian take over.

Now, I don't know if you have ever tried your hand at pottery making, but like I shared earlier, it's hard. And if you haven't tried molding and shaping pottery before, I want you to imagine sitting down with a pottery wheel and trying to shape wet clay with your hands into the shape you want to design. It's hard, it's tedious. The potter is constantly using their hands to ensure the process from wet clay to a beautiful end result is completed. When the clay is molded, it is put

into a kiln to be heated and perfected and put on display for all to see.

It's kind of what our lives are like, isn't it? God, being our potter, is constantly molding us, shaping us and ensuring a beautiful creation all throughout the process. From start to finish, God is shaping us with grace, love and compassion. And when our lives are done, when we're taken out of the proverbial kiln, God looks at us and shows the world the beauty of our lives, our legacy and says well done my good and faithful servant. I love this imagery of the potter making a creation through the lens of God's grace for us. You see, God's prevenient grace was with us even before we placed on the potter's wheel. We experience justifying grace when we allow God to start shaping and molding us. And it's in the sanctifying grace, our Christian journey that God continues to work on our lives and never gives up on us, no matter what may come our way. And when we reach the end, God has made us into the masterpiece reflecting the beauty that God saw in us before we saw it in ourselves.

How often; however, do we try to push God out of the potter's seat and take control of our own lives? If we don't have the experience and technique it takes to mold and shape pottery, then I suspect we would end up like 8 year old me trying out Sean's pottery wheel.

Maybe we try to take over when life gets stressful, hard, or we feel like there's no end to our hurt in sight. Maybe we try to take the potter's wheel away from God when we don't feel like we're being shaped the right way or when we don't think our lives are going the direction they should. The reality is, we have **to trust the potter**. We have to trust God and be willing and vulnerable to be shaped into the person God designed us to be. That's a hard thing to do though, isn't it? Being vulnerable is hard because many times we remember past experiences of being vulnerable with the wrong people; or maybe we're allowing fear to tell us we're too far gone to be vulnerable, to be accepted or that we can't find our belonging in God's world. With all of that being said, I believe that vulnerability allows for freedom to

burst forth; it allows us to claim who we are, that we are fearfully and wonderfully made creations of God that are designed to be vulnerable in Christian community with one another. It takes courage to be vulnerable. Author Brene Brown says, **“Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity.”** It takes courage and vulnerability to allow God our potter to shape us and mold us into beloved creations.

I believe there are many barriers to being vulnerable willing to have God see the icky parts of our lives and have God reshape them into something beautiful. One more quote from Brene Brown on being vulnerable. She says, **“Vulnerability is not about winning or losing. It’s having the courage to show up even when you can’t control the outcome.”** The simple fact is that we as humans want control. We want to know what the next 5 steps on our paths look like and when we don’t have that knowledge, when we don’t know what’s about to happen next, we turn into a person that allows fear to dictate our decisions. Or even yet, when one of the steps in our 5-step plan changes, we go into a spiral and forget to trust that the God who created us, loves us and cherishes us, will not lead us into the unknown alone.

Throughout my life, there have been things that happened that weren’t part of my plan. My parent’s divorce wasn’t part of my 5-step plan, tearing my ACL my senior year of high school and dashing any hope of playing very low level college baseball wasn’t part of my 5-step plan. My father dying suddenly a year ago certainly was not a part of it either. And when things didn’t go my way, I got angry. I tried to control things on my own. I allowed fear to dictate my actions and words. What I failed to see in the moments of my anger, sadness and grieving was that while every sudden change in my life wasn’t in my 5-step plan, God continued to shape and mold me and prepare me for what lay ahead.

As I was preparing for today, I had some time to reflect on my life and what I discovered is that in the past, I did not want God to shape me or mold me because I was afraid of not being good enough, smart enough, articulate enough. I allowed fear to shape and take over my life. As I was reading one day, I came across this quote and it hit me like a ton of bricks because I had been looking at my fear through the wrong lens. Author Marianne Williamson says, **“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world.**

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Church, we all have gifts, talents, and graces that no one else does - use them! Use them to liberate the oppressed, use them to offer a helping hand to someone in need, use them to help you believe in yourself when times get tough, use them to celebrate your victories along your journey. Use them and use them well. Part of allowing God to mold us and shape us is the process of taking the next step into the unknown with the power and confidence God gives us along the way, even though we might be afraid. In the midst of our fear, we have to trust the gifts, the voice, the skills God has given us to show those around us how beloved they are and that they are powerful beyond measure.

I encourage, and God encourages, each of us as we venture into the WHERE of our journey both as individuals, as a senior class and as a body of Christ, to make the WHAT, the outcome of our next steps full of adventure, full of believing in ourselves, and finding our voice in this world. And may that voice be loud, may that voice be one of compassion, one of justice, and one of mercy, even though our voice may tremble sometimes. As we learn, grow and journey along with the people we meet along the way, remember to not be afraid to show the world how powerful you are, how much you have to bring to this world. Trust me, this world needs YOU, it needs you to be a voice for the marginalized, for the hungry, for the poor, it needs you to love yourself, it needs you to love those you interact with it, and it needs you to simply be the person you were created to be. **Never let the fear of what lies ahead drown out the results of what is to come** because what you do in the future, it’s going to be powerful in your own way, and it’s going to leave a legacy for generations to come. We have a voice, we have the power to do great things in this world, don’t let fear of the unknown drown out the gift and voice inside of you.

To be honest, I don’t know what you’re facing today. Maybe you’ve come in here with a heart that is heavy, full of pain, and facing unimaginable storms. Maybe you’ve come in this week with uncertainty about what lies ahead. Maybe you’ve come in frustrated and want

to take control of your own pottery wheel. Maybe you've come in here today thinking that you are too far beyond God to do any kind of work in and through you. God's beloved creation, I want you to know that without a shadow of a doubt, that God will never leave you or forsake you. No matter what you've done and no matter where you've been, God's love and God's desire to create you into a beautiful masterpiece will never go away. You can be vulnerable with your creator because **the relationship between a creator and their creation is one that is sacred.** God our creator sees value in us even when we do not feel adequate.

If you hear nothing else today, remember verse 6 of our passage today. **“Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.”** God the potter is shaping you, molding you, carrying you, loving you through whatever may come your way so that when you come out on the other side, you will know that you are never alone. In the name of the triune God we pray, Amen.



11180 Medlock Bridge Road Johns Creek, GA 30097
770-497-8215 www.johnscreekumc.org