

***Yet you, Lord, are our Creator.
We are the clay,***

***you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.*** (Isa. 64:8)

August 6, 2017

Clay with an Attitude!

I love this image of being clay being formed into something beautiful and useful.

When I see this image in my mind, I see master hands putting a lump of clay on a wheel.. and those hands forming a pot -- a vessel ... something that will hold something.

I've never thrown clay before .. but I know that as long as the clay is wet enough and pliable enough, you can keep throwing it. I know that when you begin, the clay must stay centered on the wheel.

Isaiah creates this one, beautiful line in verse 8 (of chapter 64).



Jeremiah(18) uses similar imagery

¹⁻² *God told Jeremiah,*

“Up on your feet! Go to the potter’s house.

When you get there,

I’ll tell you what I have to say.”

³⁻⁴ *So I went to the potter’s house, and sure enough,
the potter was there, working away at his wheel.*

*Whenever the pot the potter was working on
turned out badly, as sometimes happens
when you are working with clay,
the potter would simply start over
and use the same clay to make another pot.*

⁵⁻¹⁰ *Then God’s Message came to me:*

“Can’t I do just as this potter does, people of Israel?”

God’s Decree! “Watch this potter.

*In the same way that this potter works his clay,
I work on you, people of Israel.*

The image of God as potter and we as clay we hear in our songs today:

*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*

Or from our Prayer Response:

*Change my heart oh God
Make it ever true
Change my heart oh God
May I be like You*

*You are the potter
I am the clay
Mold me and make me
This is what I pray*

Re-working... the hard work of faith. When we sign on for this life of following Jesus, it's not just a new shirt we put on.. to look nicer. it's being reformed from the inside out. It's facing the rough edges that need smoothing, The pruning that needs to be done.

We see this w/ Jesus' disciples and friends:



Peter: trying to walk on water and sinking.

Martha: complaining that her sister wasn't doing enough work serving the guests.

Thomas: who wouldn't believe until he saw the nail marks.

Paul being thrown from his horse and going blind.

John Wesley finding out all that he had been taught, and thought right about faith was suddenly thrown out and he was **on the potters wheel** once again to be shaped and formed into something different for the task at hand.... which extends to us being here today!

You see **when we say yes** to this life of faith.. it's not an add on. It's fundamental change.. being thrown on that wheel and shaped and formed for who we are to be.

Everyone has a story about how God has molded and formed them. Sometimes it's a welcomed process. Sometimes not. For some of us it's more like a roller coaster: ups and downs... feeling out of control...but it can be an exhilarating ride!

Potters in Isaiah and Jeremiah's day did not throw pots as an art form.. yes there was great skill, they were artisanal;but pots and pitchers and bowls and vesselswere utilitarian.. **formed for a purpose.**

Jesus in **Matthew 5**.. (the chapter with the beatitudes) talks about all the hard things we as disciples are to do. And then he ends the chapter with:

*"so be **perfect** as God is perfect.... "*

John Wesley talks about "going on to perfection" and "being perfected in love." Does not mean we are without faults or don't mistakes? Hardly. But it means that we are to fulfill our purpose, just as:

- a **pitcher** is formed to hold and pour water;
- a **bowl** is formed to hold things, or mix things, or serve things;
- a **cup** is formed to drink out of.

What's your purpose? As a believer.. someone who follows Jesus, you have a purpose. You are being formed and reformed to be **Perfect** ... what you were created to be.

Becoming an adult was *not* arriving at my destination.Like that pot on the wheel... I've been worked and reworked:

- I know I've been reworked in marriage,
- I've been reworked in being a parent,
- I've been reworked in each church, with each new challenge:

Each birth and death and baptism
and new member..

Each district superintendent and each bishop.



Where in the span of *your* lifetime have you seen God been moving you toward fulfilling your purpose?What has been hard? Frustrating? What are the lessons you've had to learn?

You Lord are the potter; WE are the clay.

Ahh.... but **we are not just individuals** in this church. As a whole faith community, **we are being formed** for a ***purpose***.

Jesus did not just concentrate on his disciples as individual entities:

***I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.
By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another."***

(John 13:34,5)

Each faith community has its story.. its personality..It's struggles and its successes.



Upper row left to right: First UMC Eugene, Wesley UMC,
Middle: Coburg UMC, Trinity UMC
Lower: Junction City UMC, Ebbert UMC Springfield

Being itinerate and around this area of our district for 37 years, I know these churches. I know their unique personalities. And it is fascinating how much we differ, how much we are the same, as we move through the seasons of change through which we all go.

I have watched this faith community at Eugene FUMC for all these years as well... and now I have had the joy of being a part of it with you. I know you have constantly been worked and re-worked by the Potter. It hardly seems possible that 50 years ago next year, FUMC will have been in this building. And the "first" First UMC began in 1857.

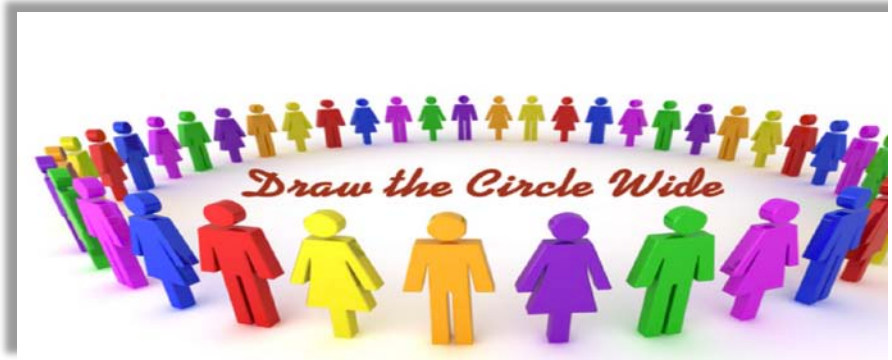
We are not the same as our mothers and fathers who began this faith community..

- And yet we share their DNA.
- And God has been at work molding us and changing us..
- And it's happening even now.

Our summer theme of ***Draw the Circle Wider.***

on the surface seems a nice platitude of let's be open to all the people who might want to join US *here* ... in our faith community.

We pride ourselves on our openness and diversity, Our willingness to accept new ideas.



But a big part of ***drawing the circle wider*** is our being willing to change... our being willing to be re-worked on the Potter's wheel.

Every time a baby is born, a person joins, someone dies, a group goes on a mission trip, or Mission U..or there is a fabulous idea birthed like "InsideOut" Sunday... and Caring Visitors..we change. ***we are re-worked.***

Every time you have a change of pastors, you are reformed: new personalities, new ideas, reworking old ones. And we are and always will be a ***work in process.***



What is next for us in this faith community? Who will join us to challenge us?

Another name for this process of constant change **John Wesley** (founder of Methodism) called: **sanctifying grace**. That is:

*Salvation is not a static,
one-time event in our lives.
It is the **ongoing experience** of God transforming us
into whom God intends us to be.*

You O God are the potter...We are the clay.

And truth to tell... we are probably all **Clay with an attitude!**

Sometimes we get the roles reversed and think WE ARE the potter, and God is the clay. How many times have we defined God for ourselves according to *our* needs and wants?



The painful and difficult times do not mean we are off track..it means we are being re-worked into something even better, stronger, more **perfect** for the tasks at hand.

What a wild and crazy ride it is to be God's faith community here in Eugene, OR In 2017.

I am so grateful to be on this journey with you.

Amen.

Preached by the Rev. Pamela Nelson-Munson at Eugene's First United Methodist Church.