

Jeremiah 18: 1 – 6

On forming and re-forming our Christian community
Rev. Allan Baker, Newtonbrook United, Sept. 13, 2009

God says, “*Jeremiah, go down to the potter’s house and there I will let you hear my words¹.*”

Just imagine the audacity of God – not directing Jeremiah to the local temple, or synagogue, or even the local church! God was willing to use the potter’s house in order to deliver a message to Jeremiah – and probably to us as well. Does this mean that God might speak to us in a location other than the sanctuary of Newtonbrook United Church? If that’s the case, why do we have this building?

Today’s reflection on the scripture is titled, “On forming and re-forming our Christian community.” As we begin this program year at Newtonbrook, let’s imagine that we are the clay that God is attempting to shape into a vessel that will be used to make this world the world of God’s dreams. We are individuals, and a Christian community, that has a mission to accomplish and we come here this morning:

- willing to be shaped by God,
- to thank and praise God for the gifts we have been blessed with,
- and to seek guidance from the Divine Potter in shaping our lives.

We have already heard how some of our ministry teams here at Newtonbrook have what I call BHAGs – Big Hairy Audacious Goals – for this program year. Those goals are in accord with our mission as a congregation, and we all have opportunities to be actively involved in those ministries that will form, and re-form our future as a congregation. We are on a journey and it is God who is calling us into the future; a future that will require us to be in a relevant shape to be the church.

We are the clay – “*just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O House of Israel.*”²

If God is the Divine Potter, and if we are the vessel formed by God’s creative hands, what is it that God has in mind for each of us, and for us as a faith community, and for all of us as a global community?

I believe that we are called to be vessels through which God’s love is poured out into God’s world.

Sometimes we humans, individuals and communities, are like vessels that get out of shape, are used for the wrong purpose, or we even forget that our purpose as a vessel of God’s love is to be here for others, and not ourselves.

I’m currently reading a book about the need for re-forming the global, national, and local communities, and our Canadian way of thinking. Thomas Homer-Dixon ‘s book, The Upside of Down³ has a lot about the “down”. After 260 pages I’m still waiting for the up! Homer-Dixon writes about environmental crises, economic crises and social crises in God’s world. None of this is new to any of us. We are all involved and we all hope for a re-formation of the way things are so

¹ Jeremiah 18:1

² Jeremiah 18:6

³ Thomas Homer-Dixon, The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity and the Renewal of Civilization, 2006, Alfred A. Knopf

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that God's dream for the world, a dream of peace and justice and harmony will be restored. We pray that the Divine Potter will re-form the world; our Christian community, and our individual lives so that all will live in the abundance that Jesus spoke about⁴.

Sometimes vessels are broken in order to create new and beautiful vessels. Here I'm using the term "vessel" in a metaphorical sense. I'm thinking of a young couple who are artistically inclined. They took tiles that they had purchased at a hardware store, broke them, and used the pieces to create an intriguing patterned surface on their living-room coffee table. It is just like the potter who re-forms, re-shapes the clay on the potter's wheel. Are we willing to be like that?

If we are to be vessels that pour God's love into God's world, we may need to look at the vessels that we are, and those we use. Are there cracks that we continually patch over – slapping some clay, or duct tape, here and there? Do we continually fix things on a temporary basis?

FAITH requires that we look deeper, even take off the patches and look below the surface. Faith requires that we offer ourselves as people who are willing to be re-formed by God's hands – to do whatever is necessary to begin again in this 21st century and be shaped into a new vessel through which God's love pours out into God's world.

Are we willing to let go and be re-shaped by the Divine Potter so that God's purpose for our life can be achieved? The Divine Potter continually offers us the opportunity to be fully human, and created in the image of God.

There is a poem called, "New Beginnings" by Bruce Wilmer that addresses our need for continual forming and re-forming ourselves, and our Christian communities. I'd like to conclude by reading it, and it will be displayed on the screen for all who are visual learners.

Prayers for God's Family and Creation – by Catherine Smith

Questions for reflection:

1. Are God's plans set in concrete, or wet clay?
2. How does this relate to the UCC New Creed where we say that we believe that "God has created and is creating?"
3. How much does God mold the people, and how much do the people mold themselves – see Romans 9: 19 – 23?
4. What message would you dramatize – as in the potter's house - as a part of your calling in life?

⁴ John 10:10