

“Like New Clay in the Potter’s Hands”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Eastertide, Sunday, April 21, 2013

Worship Theme: Vocation and Calling

Sermon Series on *“All Things New: Look What God is Doing”*

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Holy Scriptures: Isaiah 64: 8

“Yet, O Lord, you are our Creator;

*we are the clay, and you are our
potter;*

*we are all the work of
your hand.”*

We live in biblical times.

Yesterday in Boston some very welcome words were offered over a loud speaker.

The announcer said, “Ladies and gentlemen, girls and boys: welcome to Fenway Park!”

Since we worshiped together last Sunday,

we have experienced calamity and catastrophe, loss and grief, death and sadness. We’ve witnessed First Responders save lives

and sacrifice their lives for others.

We’ve been touched by the tragedy of senseless violence

and the triumph of the human spirit.

On Monday we wept for the cruelty and harm done to human life, again.

On Tuesday we became one with a town ripped in half.

On Friday we waited with baited breath, and then wept tears of relief.

On Sunday we prayerfully, faithfully, firmly set our resolve

to be one with the Spirit and one another.

Surely we are living in biblical times.

This week I was re-visiting last Sunday's sermon when a phrase stood out from the rest.

I had preached, "*...in biblical times as in today...*"

and as I pondered the phrase,

in a flash of spiritual insight I was made aware

that we are living in biblical times,
today.

God is still speaking.

We are not separated from God's loving activity in the past;

God's loving activity is as real as right now;

the future story that we will live into is yet to be
written,

and God lovingly invites us to be a part
of its creation.

Professor Walter Brueggemann teaches that the Bible

is the compilation of stories and songs, sermons and
poems, dreams and visions

of people's faith experiences of the holy.

The Bible is a theological document,

a narrative of what people made in the image of God
think and believe.

Seen in this light, the Holy Bible is a blessed gift of a living
theology,

a living testament of hope and despair, loss and grief,
joys and concerns, life and death and life after
life.

The Good Book points to the love of God for you and me and
all of us together.

While the Holy Bible may go from Genesis to Revelation,
from Creation of life to Resurrection into life
everlasting,

from new beginnings to a new Jerusalem,
the Good News is that

our biblical experience is not
done; it has only begun.

God is still speaking.

God's Word is not complete, not finished, and may only be
getting started.

New chapters and stories and scriptures are unfolding before
our eyes.

God the potter is making and remaking, shaping and
reshaping *right now*.

We are living in the age of creation and re-creation.

The Word, the Logos of God, is still being proclaimed,

still being lived out

and still transforming the ever-expanding
universe.

Even as we speak in this sacred space galaxies are being born;

families are being joined together;

relationships are formed that give meaning and hope.

God is the Potter, the Creator, the Re-creator.

We are the clay, the work of God's hands,

“bearing the dreams of God in our daring bodies.”
(Brueggemann)

Both the Prophet Isaiah and the Prophet Jeremiah

pick up on the metaphor of God as potter,

as molder and shaper of humanity and community.

Isaiah said, *“Yet, O Lord, you are our Creator;*

we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.”

In Jeremiah 18 we read:

“The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord:

“Come, go down to the potter's house,

and there I will let you hear my words.”

So I went down to the potter's house,

and there he was working at his wheel.

The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand,

and he reworked it into another vessel,

as seemed good to him.

Then the word of the Lord came to me:

“Can I not do with you, O house of Israel,

just as this potter has done?” says the Lord.

“Just like the clay in the potter's hand,

so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.” (Jeremiah 18: 1-6)

The Potter reworked the clay into another vessel,

as seemed good...

E. Claiborne Jones is an Episcopal priest in the Atlanta area.

Claiborne Jones once offered a list of ten things to consider in life and ministry,

including a word of encouragement to believe

*in "authentic humanity as the place where
resurrection takes place."*

In other words, the human condition is the place where God
chooses to work miracles,

where God's renewing power is made real,

where God is working Her purpose out,

where God changes lives and reshapes
souls.

Claiborne Jones spoke recently about a story she had read
that moved her.

"I read a story...about a little girl and her mother

who visited a sculptor's studio each day,

*watching the artist carve a lion out of a huge
block of marble.*

Finally, one day, the animal's figure was clear,

and the child recognized what it was.

She turned to her mother and said,

*"Mom, how did that man know that there was a lion
in there?"*

"As we, all of us, continue to grow and to flourish,

I hope that we will remember that it is, finally,

love alone which set us free.

Christ's love, offered to us through 4-year-olds and grandparents,

teachers, and friends, who have the courage to tell the truth.

Christ's love alone sets us free to be ourselves,

whether we are wealthy or poor, famous or unknown, not so good or good."

Claiborne Jones went on to say, *"In my yearbook my senior year,*

a friend wrote, 'Claibby, remember how many of us love you just for being you.'

Remember how many people love you, just for being you."

Remember that God and we love you, just for being you.

Like a divine sculptor,

like a potter,

like a God who joyfully makes us in God's own image

the Lord is so happy, so proud, so delighted to be your Creator.

Like they say, your picture is on God's refrigerator door.

And it is you, my friends, who are divinely made by love and in love and called to love.

And it is you, my friends, whom God calls to serve and gives a vocation, a purpose.

On a fairly regular basis

I get invited to represent the Church

by speaking with and listening to folks of all ages and backgrounds

at local schools, nursing homes, and a wide variety of settings

to discuss calling and vocation.

One time I spoke to the elementary class of our son Henry.

Walking down the hall of the school I felt pretty sharp, all dressed up and all.

A First Grader was standing by his classroom door.

“Excuse me, Sir,” he said. “Is today crazy hair day?”

Later a classmate of Henry’s decided that saying Mr. Brewer-Calvert was too difficult,

and so he decided to call me Mr. Smith.

We start with the theological grounding that we are like new

clay in the Potter's hands.

We start with the faith that we who are made good, in the image of God,

are still being formed and reformed and transformed.

And then we move into the specifics:

***“The place God calls you to
is the place where your deep gladness
and the world’s deep hunger meet.” –
Frederick Buechner***

1. What makes you truly glad?

What makes you deeply happy when you do or participate in this?

2. What deep hunger or hungers do you see in the world?

What are you thinking of when you say,

“Someone should do something about that”?

Where these two intersect, that is your vocation.

That is where God is calling you.

Everyone has a vocation. How about you?

God empowers you to live and breathe

at the intersection of personal gladness and service
above self.

Your vocation may be full time or part time;

it may be your daily life or a hobby or a rare,
occasional, special experience.

Beware that if you only seek after that which makes you glad

and make no attempt to serve the greater good,

your life may become empty, lacking in depth,
fulfillment, and meaning.

Yet also be aware that if you only practice addressing the
hungers you see

and have no joy, no gladness, no thrill or happiness in
the effort,

then you run the risk of burn out & depression,

and may feel as if your efforts are in
vain.

Let's be real here.

Did you ever learn from a teacher who did not like teaching?

Is anyone healed by a physician who doesn't want to be a
doctor?

Is a soul transformed by a preacher who wishes he or she were not in the pastorate?

Follow your joy and seek to make a difference.

Be flexible.

Your vocation may evolve and shift and change over time.

Be like new clay in the hands of the Potter.

Be open to be shaped and reshaped as the Lord has need of you.

Talk about changing vocations:

Your pastor went to clown school,
juggled for spare coins on the streets of Boston,
worked in a circus,
and then ran away from the
circus to join the church.

This morning Isaiah and Jeremiah and the Living Word of God

reminds us that our Creator is not afraid
to change direction, change course, or change
her mind.

Let us be encouraged.

Let our souls be supple.

Let us be willing to be formed and re-formed by God the Potter.

The foundational conviction of our vocation

is that we are called, made with a purpose, and sent.

The time to serve is now and the place is here.

This is the age of God's re-creation of the human condition.

Surely we are living in biblical times.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

WORSHIP RESOURCES:

Call to Confession

Beloved, God responds quickly to the choices we make. Our actions have consequences in our relationships with one another and God. Whether we want it to or not, our choices and deeds influence God's responses and actions. Repent, turn away from evil, believe in the Good News, and do what is pleasing in the sight of the Lord.

Prayer of Confession

We thank you, Lord, for making us in your divine image. We are also deeply grateful that you are like a potter, shaping and molding us like clay on a spinning wheel. Hear our confession of sin and wrongdoing. Transform us with your grace. Like the psalmist who sought cleansing and pardon, we ask you to “create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” Amen. (Psalm 51:10)

Call to Offering

This morning Jeremiah reminds us that God is not afraid to change direction, change course, or change her mind. Be encouraged. Let us not be afraid as well. Be willing to be formed and re-formed by God the Potter. May our offerings of time, talent and treasure reflect our faith that the Church of Jesus Christ is malleable in the hands of God, and therefore a powerful force of goodness with which the world must reckon.

Prayer for Offering

God of Grace, please accept and bless these offerings we place before you. May they be used to change lives, change minds, and change the world for the glory of God. In your name we pray. Amen.

Call to Communion

The clay of our souls is an active agent. We are not passive, nor are we ever so hardened that we cannot be transformed. Come to the Table of the Lord, one and all, and know that God lovingly seeks to rework you and the whole people of Jesus Christ into another vessel, as seems good to God.

Benediction

One: We came to this sacred space to celebrate and affirm that the Lord is like a potter, making and reshaping us into God's image to be and share the Good News.

Many: Lord, send us out into your world as your change agents to help mold and remake the human condition, with your grace and your help. Let it be so in this age and forever more. Amen!