September 8th , 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Ordinary Time

10:30 am

Broken and Reclaimed

1. On the Potter’s Wheel

As the clay is distributed among you, feel free to take it out of its wrapping, and see how tangible and flexible it is to move. It will capture the imprint of your fingers, and just the slightest move will change its form. As you let the clay roll around in your fingers, I want you to imagine something bigger: the potter’s wheel where a large blob of clay is thrown on the wheel and as the wheel spins, this unrefined, unimportant, insignificant piece of earthen clay turns into something absolutely beautiful – absolutely stunning. Or maybe as the wheel turns, the clay doesn’t shape to the artists hand and she has to pick it up again and throw it back on the wheel and start all over again. There is something spiritual about pottery – about this making and creating, from Biblical times to today – this mystery that something unrefined from the earth can become something new and beautiful through the gentle push and pull of a human hand.

In the book of Jeremiah, we are reminded of the spirituality of clay and the potter’s hand, “Just like the clay in the potters hand, so are you in God’s hands.” We are a people who are called to be flexible, to acknowledge the times in which we are broken, and let us be reshaped and remade by God’s loving, gentle, firm, hands.

1. Being Formed

Have you ever felt like you were thrown down on the potter’s wheel – or maybe the wheel of life? Those experiences where we felt things could never be reconciled – perhaps it’s in the most difficult moments – the moments we lose our beloved, the moments we recognize ourselves as helpless or fragile, the moments where the weight of the world casts a burden on our shoulders that is too heavy to lift. Whether you’ve had, what people might call a ‘cushy’ life, or whether your life has been riddled with pain – we can all share the common human experience of feeling stuck, feeling like this little blob of clay, not much of anything.

1. But then we remember

But then we remember, or someone reminds us – that the life we have, the times when we feel like a blob of clay isn’t the end of the story, even if it feels like it is. We hold the promise in our hands, we hear the words we know well – that we are wonderfully made, crafted with intention, and created and recreated again and again by a Spirit who calls us to more.

I think it is difficult, when you feel like a blob, to remember God’s abiding promise of love and a future and a hope beyond measure. When I was walking yesterday amidst the Out of the Darkness Crowd in Carroll County, I looked at the names of individuals whose lives were lost by suicide. Those who did not get to see themselves recreated or recrafted – and it breaks your heart.

Suicide, by nature, is a product of mental illness, which comes in all shapes and forms and is in nature a biochemical imbalance. Just alike any other illness, whether an imbalance of insulin in diabetics, or electrolytes causing you to feel faint – suicide is a possible outcome of an illness. As I looked around the group, I remembered once again that those who died did not die due to being weird, not being strong enough or resilient enough – I recognized that our diminishing mental health system and community bonds were part of the cause.

I heard from a congregant recently this phrase that she used with those who she worked with who had suicidal ideation. She said, “It wasn’t that they wanted to die, it was that they didn’t know how to live.” And there is so much truth in that statement – they felt like this blob, like this person, who could not ever imagine the future being better or of God crafted them from an awful experience into something new and beautiful.

1. Bearers of the Good News

As the people of Christ, we are called to be a people of good news, as well as bearers of hope. When I do not have hope, I need you to hold that hope for me. When you do not have hope, I will hold the Christ light for you as we journey together. This community is called to say that out of clay, out of our human selves, God can created beautiful things.

As you have the clay in your hands, I want you to stretch it out and then form it back into a ball, back and forth, again and again, almost like you are kneading bread. Have you ever felt God pull you, stretch you? So like the clay, I’m going to ask you to stretch yourself as the body of Christ in this world, particularly in light of the experience I had yesterday.

Because, as I walked, I felt convicted once again about the community we are meant to be: for those who are suffering, for those who do not dare to speak their sadness, for those who feel like no one hears them – we are the community that is called to be the safe haven and sanctuary. When someone needs to tell you their struggle, I want you to sit with them in it – I don’t need you to say platitudes of ‘It will get better soon, God is doing this for a purpose.” No, I want you to sit in the struggle and listen. And if you say anything, you can say, “I’m sorry you are going through this, but I am with you, as much as you want me to be. I am here.” Do not judge, do not try to fix it, but just be there as they feel like a blob in the midst of this world. Because by sitting and listening, when someone feels heard and known, you are decreasing the chances of self-harm and suicide and further depressive thoughts by scores.

1. Created and Made

Maybe you will need to be the person who listens, perhaps you will need to be listened to, but I long for SPC to be a community where that sense of deep safety and community builds and builds and becomes natural. And as you look at your clay, as you shape and form it yourself into something new or beautiful or different or original, may you know that right now, by stretching and pulling and molding and sculpting, God is crafting something gorgeous within you and me right now. It may hurt, it may not look pretty, there might be some hairline cracks or holes, but God’s crafting is perfect. When SPC is named in the community, let it be a place where it is known that all are welcome, unconditionally. If it turns out that we are a bunch of weirdos for Christ who love beyond measure, so be it. Christ loves the ones who are willing to dare, the ones who listen, the ones who journey with, the ones who are vulnerable enough to speak the truth, and resilient enough to go into the world to do the good work God calls us to. So, go and be Christ, in this place, and in this world. Alleluia. Amen.