

The Potter
Isaiah 64:1-9

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be truly open to the word of God this day. Amen.

In our first reading today we get the image of God as the potter and we are the clay, that is formed and given life. So to help illustrate this image I went out and bought a pot made of clay, so that you all have something to concentrate on during my sermon. So here is the pot I could find, I know it is nothing exciting but let's contemplate this pot today. It is the normal everyday pot that you see at most nurseries. It has a solid base, wide rim on top and a hole right in the center. It is pretty much the standard pot you have all probably seen before. Someone must have taken time to make this pot, gotten the materials together and formed into this shape, perhaps nowadays a machine has control over mixing and spinning and forming these type of pots, but somewhere someone had to be there to get it all started.

Even in Isaiah's day, he knew that a pot had to come from somewhere, somewhere somebody took the clay and formed it together creating a usable pot. And he uses this image to illustrate what he believes God to be doing. In our text today, Isaiah is saying that we are the clay and that God is the potter. God is the one who forms us and creates us. God is the one who gathers our parts together, taking hold of the clay, breaking off a good chunk, mixing it with just enough life giving water, to form something that is malleable and workable. God gently presses, folds, rolls, and spins us into being. And before you know it, wa-la, we are a beautiful creation. And God sets us up and tells us to live up to our potential, to do what we are called to do, to be useful and a living active part of the kingdom now and forever.

And what do we do, with this beautiful creation that God has given us, we hide it, we turn away from it, we put it away and say well its not that great, I can't, I won't, I Don't have time, we each phrase or thought we separate ourselves away from God and his will for us. We go into our own lives, our own desires, our own secrets and dark places of sin. We turn away from God.

In Isaiah's day the children of Israel had been separated from God. They had been given the promised land, they were picked as the chosen people of God, they were blessed with the promise of the everlasting covenant, but now they were separated, they had lost sight of that covenant. Israel, the people were separated from the Promised Land, the land that God had promised to their ancestors Abraham and Sarah, the land they had lived in since the time of their return in Moses day. The land where Saul, David, and Solomon were

kings of history. But now they had been taken off to a foreign land. In the Promised Land, they had praised their Lord for the land they had been given. In Israel they would worship God in the temple that Solomon had built and in which God dwelt. Now that temple had been destroyed and they had been carried off far from its site. Now, in exile, they lived in a land where people worship other gods.

It was bad enough that the children of Israel were separated from the temple and their homeland, but there was more. They were also separated from God, as if they had been put into a bag that hid them from sight. They felt cut off, alone, abandoned. Even though they knew God, their hearts were hard, and they had turned their backs on their heavenly father. In their separation from the divine love of God they suffered. It may have taken an invading army to take them away, but their hearts had already strayed from the place where God dwelt. When they had listened to God and lived in the covenant with the Lord they were blessed and strong in faith. Now however since they had cut themselves off from the will of God they had been lost. They had been gathered up, formed, molded and created by God, but through their own sins and hardened hearts they had turned away from God, hidden from God's glory and lived in darkness.

People haven't changed much since Isaiah's day. People today are exiled from the Promised Land in their own way. We separate ourselves from beliefs, moral, and the word of God that have stood for thousands of years. We slowly chip away from the glory of God, The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; turning this way or that just enough over time that we soon don't even know who God is anymore. Like the people of Israel, the armies of the world, with slick marketing, societal assimilation, peer acceptance, distractions, and business, the armies in so many ways carry the people of God far away from the promises God's eternal kingdom. We live in an age when people's hearts are still hardened away from God. We have been separated from the only one who could show us how to truly love one another, to truly show us what peace is, to know the glory of the Good News. As a result we suffer from spiritual and emotional isolation, hidden in darkness of emotional suffering, in the darkness of sin, we are covered and hidden away.

But that is nothing new isn't it. This has always been the human condition. Humanity constantly is pulling away from the love of God, trying to go their own way, separating ourselves from the Heavenly Father. Sin has been with us since the very beginning, it is our base nature. And because of our separation we have no reference to what the meaning of love is, we can't even understand wholeness, because in our sinfulness we have smashed

ourselves in thousands of pieces. Remember our pot here at the beginning. We are still in there bag, But sin has done its work smashing us, crushing us and tearing us apart. It is ugly and painful. And as the wages of sin crush more and more, all we get is more sin and oppression trying to piece it all back together again. One human being mistreating another. One trying to fix another. One trying to overcome someone else. Because of sinfulness and hard heartedness human hearts have always strayed from the place where God dwells. And like the Children of Israel we dwell in a strange land. Exiled from the places and the people we love, separated from them because of our own lovelessness.

This is the darkness and results of sin. And it seems that there is no answer for it. It is painful, ugly, shameful, it separates us from God, hides us, and breaks us down in many pieces. It seems there is no solution to this human dilemma of a smashed life. But Isaiah had an answer. He knew that what the people needed was to be reconnected to God. To come into the presence of the Divine once again. They needed to experience God with them, as they did in the desert, when God led them out of captivity. They needed to come face to face with God like Moses did on Sinai. They needed more than just getting their temple and land back. They needed God to be so close to them that they could touch the Almighty's robes. It is one thing to know that someone somewhere cares, it is another thing entirely to have them standing in front of you crying with you, embracing you and saying words of comfort. They needed God to become so real for them and so close that they would see the glory and power.

“Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence – as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire caused water to boil. To make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!”

Isaiah calls out asking for the Lord to come down, tear apart the heavens, come with fire and rage, come with power and might, tear apart the heavens and shake the mountains, come down and Lord and make it known that you are God of all, Blessed all glorious. To rip apart the darkness that hides us and tear in the light of your glory, to bring us wholeness in your power. He wanted a immediate forceful coming of God's glory to pull us all together. He saw people that were in pieces and they needed God to come into this life and bring them out again.

And the gospel message today is that his prayer was answered. Maybe not in the time he wanted. Maybe not in the way he wanted. But we stand on the other side of the birth of

Christ and see that God did come into this world to mend our brokenness, to make us a new creation. To establish the kingdom and call us each by name as brothers and sisters in Christ at our Baptisms. God did enter into our darkness of sin, and hatred, and suffering. God all powerful did become human, born as weakly as an infant. God came as fellow human, taking upon himself the sins of all creations. The heavens were torn opened, if you recall at his baptism, and the voice of God was heard and the Spirit was seen pouring down upon Jesus, and through Jesus to all the world. God present with us now and forever. Yes Christ has come and Christ is coming again.

Maybe today its time that we should pray like Isaiah did, with the same commitment and hope the same earnestness and faith that drove Isaiah to reach out to God seeking his coming. As we draw closer to the remembrance of Christ's coming, let us pray with expectation for that day when Christ will come again in power and glory and all things will be new. The time is coming. Isaiah knew it was coming. Jesus knew it was coming. And we know that time is coming when you will be made new and all brokenness and darkness will be left behind. Let us give thanks this day. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you today and throughout the week to come.
AMEN.