

Prayer of the Holy Spirit

Good Morning Friends!

We are looking at the metaphor of God as Potter. In an ancient world Pottery was not for decorative pieces... pottery was for everyday functional uses.

We have heard the important message that God formed each one of us in a container to be a container through which God pours God's word and love.

We've heard how God's people get distracted by worldly things and lose focus, and the prophet Jeremiah called us to center ourselves on God's will and God's ways.

We have heard of the imagery of a Potter working at the Potter's Wheel. ... of God as the potter who recognizes that the direction of the clay as it is being shaped is not going to bring out its best qualities and so begins to rework it on the wheel.

We asked...If God is the potter, then who is the clay?

Many times we think of the clay as us...individuals. But a close reading of this text reveals that it is the whole community... the nation (Israel, Judah). So we must also apply this to ourselves as a faith community... and we could measure our nation in light of this text... how well are we following God's will and God's ways?

As long as the clay is continually worked by the potter, it can still be changed and made into something beautiful !

Last week we heard about shards, fragments, and broken pieces... And how God keeps on keeping on... faithfully working with what is ready, re-working as needed, but NEVER fully destroying, wiping out everything.

Today, this testimony of Jeremiah is a lament. The prophet is in despair for the people of Judah.

"The harvest is past and the summer has ended." The growing seasons are over and they are not fed.

The people are plagued by enemies from without and from within, and they seek respite in things that cannot bring comfort and healing.

Despair can penetrate the deepest crevices of our minds and spirits, what ancient Hebrew psychology calls the heart. Is there no one who can stop the pain and violence? Is there no balm in Gilead?

Jeremiah's answer is: "You don't need to go to Gilead; you have the balm right here!"

There is no medicine that can heal despair and hopelessness like the Spirit of God who bids them and us to follow in the ways of God's love and justice.

Jeremiah calls the desperate, hopeless people to be lovingly remade by the potter who can bring the balm that they long for.

We get entrenched in habits of the heart, and end up sinking into despair, grief, and hopelessness.

We have thoughts like "Is this all there is?" It can be comforting somehow to know that God is okay with our having those thoughts. Jeremiah had them with and for the people; this lament is one of many.

But Jeremiah assures us that hopelessness and despair don't have the final word, that God offers a balm for every wound.

Pottery was used in the ancient world to hold not only water but also oil ("balm") that was used in soothing dry and cracked skin and healing wounds.

The reference to "Gilead" is to a mountain area in the TransJordan (east of the Jordan river from the Yarmuk River south to the Jabbok River and Mt Nebo. The balm is gathered from bark... En Gedi is thought to have been a place to collect the balm, as is Qumran, according to the jugs and juglets found there. The balm may have been in oil or lotion form.

Listen to this fragment from the story of an apprentice potter who returns to the Mentor's workshop. She recalls...

<READ MONOLOGUE> Monologue from the Potter's House: "A Jug of Oil"
Rev. Glenna T. Shepherd's fifth monologue in the six-part series:

I was with her when the priest came to call. He had a vision, and he needed her expertise, the beauty that she continuously created. The potter's friend and the baker in the village had lovingly baked communion bread for the parish for the past forty years. She died last Tuesday, and all in the village were heart-broken. The priest wanted a way to pour the love and comfort of God over everyone, to soothe their grief. Would she make a jar to hold the oil that would anoint the heads of her friends? I expected her to just say "yes," to seize this opportunity to comfort those who mourned together. But she didn't. She just looked at him and wept. Silently, with tears flowing freely, she went to her wheel, centered the clay. And with her own tears mingling with the softening lump of clay, she began.

Friends, Sometimes naming our grief can be the balm we seek.

I invite you to whisper, speak, or write what grieves you this day (personal or societal) as a way to give voice and release and then to come forward to be anointed on the forehead and on your palms, as sign of empowering strength.

The Caring Ministers will receive you.

(close time in prayer)

May it be so. Amen.