

The Clay and the Potter

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Isaiah 64:1-9

Nov 29, 2020

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Isaiah 64:1-9

O 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 causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed.

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

We have a very cool Advent calendar at home. It's in the shape of a Christmas tree and has 24 little drawers to fill with a daily treat, candy, or coin, to mark the countdown to Christmas. Each morning there is an excitement and eagerness to see what is in the drawer, and just how much closer we are to Dec 25. The closer we get to Christmas Day, the higher we climb the tree. The idea of Advent waiting is the waiting for Christmas Eve, and Santa, stockings and long desired presents under the tree.

This is the secular, the popular, idea of Advent as a slow yet steady crescendo leading up to the blissful joy and celebration of Christmas day. And in this strange year, this looking forward with delight and anticipation carries more meaning. Perhaps more than ever we revel in the joys of the season. I'll confess, I started listening to Christmas music even before Halloween this year—you know, life's little pleasures in 2020.

In our faith, and in our hearts, though, we know that Advent waiting is so much more than waiting for Santa on Christmas Eve, waiting for festivities and typical gatherings, for shopping and wrapping, for singing carols, for listening to the magical sound of hand bells and seeing the sacred beauty of Silent Night candles lighting the sanctuary. In Advent we hear the cries of the prophet Isaiah as he speaks for the people waiting, and waiting, for the promised Messiah. Isaiah laments the apparent distance of God who seems to be secured in the heavens, far away and aloof from the troubles of the people who are weary, burdened and in a time of great hardship.

O 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 causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, O God, come be with us, redeem us from the pains and the challenges and the despair and the divisions that hold us back from living and loving as we have been created to do. This Advent is unlike any other in our lifetimes, yet, this season of unwanted separations, overwhelming challenges and even unexpected opportunities is not unlike other times in human history.

Awareness of brokenness and evil in the world then and now causes us to cry out to God to make things right—to put death’s dark shadows to flight. And although in our tradition we tend to pay little attention to the second coming of Christ, that too is a part of Advent, as Paul reminds us, “as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Advent reminds us of the ways that our relationship with God needs healing and renewal. ‘We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.’ The world is broken, and we are too.

Advent reminds us of the ways that our relationship with God needs healing and restoration, that Christ will be born in us again. As we await his birth, Advent is a season of hope as we see God’s awesome deeds.

Just as those who long ago waited with hope for the Messiah to heal and redeem them, we too have hope in the midst of trying times. Advent reminds us that Christian hope is shaped by what has happened and what’s going to happen again. We remember the hope of God’s people in the Old Testament as they relied upon God’s guidance, grace and forgiveness in their despair and oppression, and we remember the great prophecies of hope that pointed toward the coming of the Messiah. Our hope, with God at the center, offers us purpose, endurance and encouragement. As Jay Y. Kim writes in *Hope: An Expectant Leap*,” This is what Christian hope looks like. It doesn’t ignore fear, anxiety, and doubt; it confronts them. It holds steady, clinging to peace in the midst of chaos. Through life’s many treacherous storms ... Christian hope is buoyed by something greater that has happened and something greater that is going to happen again.

The Advent calendar at home is about fun and anticipation, but we have another Advent calendar this year that connects to the hope of what the Messiah brings to a hurt, broken world. This year we, Smith Memorial Church and the Stonebridge Montessori School, are participating in a Reverse Advent Calendar. Rather than receiving something on each day, we will be putting something aside for the food pantry. Instead of receiving, we will be giving. Each day means a can or box or jar for our neighbors in need of helping hand right now. The Reverse Advent

Calendar signifies what the season of Advent means in the church year, and for our neighbors in need. Sharing what we have is a sign of hope, a light breaking into a dark world.

Isaiah's words began with lament at God's apparent distance up in the heavens, yet end in hope. He affirms not only that we belong to God, that we are God's forgiven people, but that we are continually being made, reshaped, recreated, and molded by God hands. God is the potter, and we are the clay. This image more than catches our imagination as it vividly calls us to see that God wants to mold us, to make us new again and again. That is hope no matter what confronts us, hope even though our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. Advent hope reminds us of the ways that our relationship with God needs healing and renewal. The potter yet again shapes, molds, and recreates us in the divine image, freeing us to start over and to not be lacking in any spiritual gift.....

Pick up a lump of clay and mold it in your hands
Think about the creation of the world—
the touch of God's hands on the very substance of the universe

As you change the appearance of the clay with the touch of your hands,
think how the world you live in has touched and changed you...

Think of how your hands have touched other people –
in love, in anger, in sorrow and in joy...

Think of the things and people who have touched your life
and molded you into the person you are today...

“Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.” (Isaiah 64:8)

Prayer (Martin Luther)

Look, Lord, on an empty vessel that needs to be filled.
In faith I am weak—strengthen me.
In love I am cold—warm me and make me fervent
so that my love may go out to my neighbor.
I doubt and am unable to trust you completely.
Lord, strengthen my faith and trust in you.
You are all the treasure I possess.
I am poor, you are rich,
and you came to have mercy on the poor.
I am a sinner, you are goodness.
From you I can receive goodness,
but I can give you nothing.
Therefore I shall stay with you.
Amen.