

Celebrating God's Presence Among us

The Rev. Damaris D. Whittaker

Jeremiah 18:1-8
Center Church-The First Church of
Christ in Hartford
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*“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, and seemed good to him.”*

Let us pray.

We are excited to be gathered here this morning in this Meeting House to celebrate *Homecoming Sunday* together.

We are feeling hopeful and expectant of what this year will bring our way. You and I have now been together for one year, and certainly we have engaged in a serious process to reshape the work of the church in the future.

As we move forward, we move forward following our vision and mission. Thus, I want to start our church year with a series of sermons that highlight our guiding principles.

We begin by “celebrating God's presence among us.” The beauty of God's presence is that it does not always manifest the same way.

Unlike many things in our lives, we like to enter it into as a process. Put it through a series of events. Make the necessary list, so that we can check it off. God's presence among us is unpredictable, and it is intangible.

In the scripture this morning, Jeremiah goes to the potter's house and finds there the potter working at his wheel. Please note that a potter working with clay was an everyday occurrence in the ancient world.

When Jeremiah arrives, the vessel the potter was working on was spoiled or turned out badly. But the potter did not throw the clay away. He reused it to form another vessel.

The potter reworked the clay into another item that “seemed good to him.” Now, this was not a touch up. This was not a reinforcement job. This was a total reconstruction.

When we think of deconstruction, we think of uselessness. Purposeless items without any value. Images that reflect loss of integrity enter our minds. We see images of total deformation.

But, is it not true that the light shines through the brokenness?

And, I would submit, that the light of the Spirit shines through our brokenness, and moreover, broken vessels are used by God

Thomas Kempis said: “Our eyes are always closed to the presence of God. When we encounter a broken vessel, our eyes are open.”

Jesus was a broken vessel. Jesus died in shame, loneliness, and with no reputation.

So, is God present in the midst of brokenness? Is God’s presence in the potter’s house?

Because we think about celebrating God’s presence, we think of jubilee -- jubileo; balloons and confetti.

But, how do we celebrate God’s presence when God is trying to mold us?

How do we celebrate God’s presence when God is trying to break us, and to shape us anew?

How do we celebrate God’s presence when God’s love can be experienced as “tough love”?

How do we celebrate God’s presence **when God’s love is in the reworking of the clay—painful and unpleasant?**

First, we find our way to the potter's house. Because, even if you have been there before, even if the space may feel familiar to you, this time around, you may gain a different understanding.

Second, let's respond to the call to action. There is a call to "turn." In the Scripture this morning, God calls Israel to turn, and I submit that God is calling us to do the same.

Turning and changing can be also described as making and molding. Once we have arrived at the potter's house, once we make a few right turns. Let's us allow ourselves to be shaped—don't fight it. Let it happen to you.

Let us not worry about the shape we are in now. Let us look forward to the reshaping of God for the future.

When we arrive at the potter's house, we will be as an ever-changing clay.

I guarantee you that it is going to be painful. It is going to be messy. You will be hot; you will be bothered. You will be hot and bothered.

You will have complaints and are going to be uncomfortable. You will be tempted to go to the comfortable place that you know. You will find yourself in the middle of the reshaping, and you are going to look back and say, "Man, if only I could go back to when I was not this broken."

But you are going to be in the middle of it, and I tell you this morning -- let the shaping continue!

Do not be distracted by the process. Keep your eyes on that wonderful new shape we will have.

And...when we are in the middle of the two stones being molded, there in the middle of the dust, mess, heat, wetness, inconvenience, sense of disorientation that you are going to be feeling...rest in the fact that God's presence is in the process, that we are in it because God called and we answered. And—there—while experiencing the pain of transformation -- there -- we will find God's presence among us.

I hope that we can find the courage to get there, so that we can celebrate! Amen.