

“Life in Good Hands,” Jer. 18:1-11; Luke 14:25-33; 9-9-2007; Albany UMC

In the book Chicken Soup for the Parent’s Soul, I found this interesting article entitled “Dancing in the Street.” I thought you might also like it. The story goes like this:

It happened on a bright morning, early in September, some years ago as I came out the front door of my home on my way to work. As I headed for my car, I saw her, out there in the middle of the road. Dancing. My neighbor. A mother. A wife. Otherwise, quite mature.

Nevertheless, dancing in her pajamas and robe, and wearing her giant furry-dog bedroom slippers. Sipping on coffee, dancing. Curlers in the hair. And all alone, to the tune of some music only she could hear, my neighbor was dancing!

I was stopped dead in my tracks. Staring. She saw me and laughed, and giggled and danced some more. And then, by way of explanation, she called out to me: “I have four children, and this morning, my youngest just went off to her first day of school. I’M FREEEEEE!” And she kept on dancing!” (p.302)

I am sure many of you parents may understand what this woman was talking about. The same book says, “The relationship between parent and child is the deepest, most intense and richest in all our human experience. As we watch our children grow from babyhood to adulthood, we experience the full spectrum of emotions, from the heights of total elation to the depths of sorrow. Parenthood is complex and the experiences we have raising our children can be a mixed bag, both good and bad.”

As someone says, children don’t come to us with an instruction manual. And there are thousands of conflicting ideas on parenting. Bottom line is that each child is different and needs a unique way of parenting.

It is very interesting to see in the Bible that the way God is shaping, training, and nurturing the people of Israel is like a parenting that we do for our children. Today’s Jeremiah text gives us a good example of it.

One day, the prophet Jeremiah was told by God to get up and go to the potter's house down the street. So he went and there Jeremiah was watching a craftsman making a pot at his wheel.

I am sure you can picture the scene. To make a pot or jar, what we need first is clay. Nowadays, you may buy a lump of clay from stores that is already ready to go. But in old days, you go out and dig up your own clay. Once you have the clay, you lay it out on the ground and spread it out and dry it. After that, you clean the clay. You need to see if there are debris and stones that you don't need. After that, you grind it up. Once the clay is ready, you mix it with water and knead it. Then you take a lump of clay and put it on a wheel. It is a kind of messy process. But everything has to be done with great care. A work of art does not just come unless you put your energy and soul in it.

The thing is, whatever you make, it has to be perfect in the eyes of the one who is making it.

That's what Jeremiah saw there. Everything was fine in the process. The potter was so focused on what he was doing. At one point, however, the vessel he was making on the wheel was spoiled. In other words, it did not turn out the way he expected. He did not like it. When he did not like it, the potter did not just throw it in the garbage. He squished it up and started all over. He was acting like nothing happened before. A brand new start! When he was not pleased with it again, he did the same thing over and over.

Then, eventually, Jeremiah saw a smile on the potter's face. He was happy and pleased to see this great artifact. Then God whispered to Jeremiah: "My son, don't I have the right to do with your people what the potter did with the clay?" (18:1)

To God, the nation Judah and its people were the clay in his hands and God was the Potter.

Because of what they had done and had not done, the people of Israel were about to be punished. God had expected a perfect, shiny vessel that deserved the name, "God's chosen people." But out of their disobedience and disloyalty,

they turned out to be something God had never planned them to be. So the result would be an exile to a foreign land, the Babylon.

But that was not the end of it. God, the creator, the potter did not trash the imperfect vessel. He would reshape it; He would give it another chance.

Israel's fate was still in the hands of the potter even when everyone else on the planet thought there would be no future for them. God wanted to assure Jeremiah that it was God who was still in charge, and that God would make a good pot out of this once-failed vessel. God wanted Jeremiah to see that the destruction of Jerusalem was not the final word. Even though there would be some pain and sufferings, there would be time for them to come back home. God would let them start over.

The way God treats us is the same in our lives. God is an artist; the good and perfect artist. His hands are not only tender and soft but good, generous, and merciful hands. He wants to make good pots out of us.

One of the most terrible mistakes we can make is telling ourselves, "Man, you are hopeless" or "Your life is over."

God never abandons His children as any parent wouldn't. God awaits us with love; God awaits us with patience; God awaits us with his own time table.

There is frustration, of course. As a parent, you feel exhausted and disappointed when your children bring you troubles; sometimes you want to be free from all these problems. So I can sympathize with the woman who was dancing around in the middle of the street when her last child started school. We know the feeling.

But God never feels exhausted by taking care of us and nurturing us. God never wants His children to go away. God would be rather dancing around if any wayward child comes to Him. God would be exclaiming if we come and say to Him, "God, I am sorry. From now on, you are the most important thing in my life. I want to give my life to you. In the past, I was always after my own greed and pleasures. Now I am back to you. I am yours."

That's exactly what Jesus was telling the disciples to do in today's Gospel.

We all make mistakes. Our lives are not perfect. We all have problems.

That's why Jesus Christ died on the cross for all of us. Because Jesus paid price for us, God takes us as we are, broken and cracked vessels.

God is the Potter and we are the clay.

For the clay to be reshaped into a beautiful artifact, it has to give itself to the potter. It has to be fully possessed by the hands of the master, the Potter.

Just as the clay gives itself to the potter, we give ourselves to God. God, the creator, knows what kind of debris and stones we have in our lives. By coming and giving ourselves to God, we allow God to sort out these faulty elements and reshape our life the way that God wants.

“Just as the potter takes faulty clay and remolds it, our God takes our broken lives and make something new out of them.

God wants us to be good vessels for service, not cracked and broken down. He wants to use us in the most thrilling adventure of life - building His kingdom in this world.” (esermon.com)

Our life is in God's hands. And those hands are good hands, the best hands, in which we want to put our lives. Praise God. Amen.