

## Sense of Clay

Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:24-37

### Slide: Dry Clay

All of us are muddy, dirt creatures. Can you imagine how much easier it would be if we human beings could have the humility to remember from whence we came: dirt. We, all of us, and all those in this world, all creatures that walk the earth, are made of the same stuff of creation: carbon, star stuff - dirt. We are clay.

And, although we can look at the Genesis story, the moment of creation when the human ones became more than clay, when the God of all things breathed life into us, transforming the carbon, that star stuff to have life...well, think briefly what that means. God had intention. God had desire to make, mold, and bring about something good, as much as we can muddle about today wondering if it really is.

Still, if you have ever been to a graveside, or at the bed of a loved one at their

death, or sat with a pet as their last breath came, dirt, clay, mud - we return to the very earth from which we were made, even though we may deny it or not see it that way unless forced to, as we hear like a lament in today's reading from the prophet Isaiah:

### Slide: We are the clay

*"Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand."*

That's why our Scripture has images and metaphors of clay everywhere. That's why the prophets and all those who had experiences of the God who created them, wrote of and spoke of these images of being like vessels and pots, molded, stretched, made new by Almighty God. And, the people of God would have known what went into making, molding, and creating a vessel for which to hold things. Clay pots were commonplace and it's likely that every town and village had in them their own potters. The metaphor no doubt

would have meant more to the people of God of that time.

**Slide: “No eye...”**

This week then, when reading the Scripture from the prophet Isaiah, and knowing that the start of the season of Advent was upon us, a season of expectation, waiting and of anticipation, I felt a desire to understand what it truly means to have the patience and dedication to make a pot from clay but also to find out just how long a pot takes before it can be called completed. I called up Eric Holey, the only potter I know, and asked to get my senses fired up – to find out just how it actually is to make a pot practically and artistically and to experience this.

**Slide: Eric Holey**

Walking into his studio, my first thought was that I wished I had not worn black. A good potter has clay everywhere. White smudges, old glazing stains, and dust in the air suggested that he was a true potter – one who doesn't just make a pot and call it

good. Making a pot has specific steps, four to be exact, and as he described them, it became obvious to me that this metaphor of being the clay and the potter being God was more than just a saying. Each step of making a pot shows the journey our faith takes and ought to take this Advent.

**Slide: Wedging**

**Step One: Wedging -**

Preparing the clay, getting it ready to be put on the wheel, the clay is kneaded to push the molecules closer together so that the clay can be molded easier. This step is messy. It's hard, physical work, but necessary to prepare a beautiful pot. Imagine your relationship with God with this imagery. In your life of faith, God takes the time to prepare you for daily life and vocation, getting you prepared and ready to grow, wedging you to be the person God hopes you will become in faith. This process is messy and sometimes painful, but necessary to become what God intends.

### **Slide: Centering the Clay**

**Step Two: Centering the Clay-** This is the step where the clay is placed on the wheel, water is added, and the clay is centered, molded into becoming one piece, and to keep any wobble out, so that as it is later sculpted, it will be a pot with fewer cracks and with a firm foundation. Think about how in your faith life God works on you to help you to have a good foundation, so that when difficulties arise: flaws, cracks, and blemishes, you still can stand and continue to be molded.

### **Slide: Opening the Clay**

**Step Three: Opening the Clay-** Compressing the bottom of the pot then presses the molecules even closer together so that the pot does not crack. Water is also very necessary at this stage for molding the pot. So, too, does water mold our faith – the waters of baptism add to our own clay the purpose and will of God for our lives. This purpose is God’s desire for us to live lives fully connected to the Potter.

### **Slide: Shaping**

**Step Four: Shaping the Clay-** This last step to create a pot is when tools are used to create the shape, to give it final form. This is done deliberately and slowly – different tools make for a different kind of pot, but all tools are used to create a pot that is unique and beautiful. All pots are one of a kind once the tools are used. So, too, does God create us as separate, unique and beautiful creatures, each of us being slowly created to become who we are with the spiritual tools God gives each of us.

### **Slide: The Potter’s Hand**

Once these four steps are done, the pot is fired, glazed and then fired again, creating a beautiful pot for many practical and wonderful uses in life. What a beautiful metaphor of faith and example of relationship, especially for the start of Advent as God the Potter continues to patiently bring us closer and closer to the redemption we are waiting for and desire in life – the redemption we prepare to see

in the coming of Christ, not only at Christmas, but when Christ comes again, so that we may, as Jesus asks us in the Gospel reading for today to stay awake and patient in our waiting Him.

Here is the pot Eric made when I visited his shop. However, as you can see, it is a work in progress, just like our faith is. The completion of a pot takes time and then when finished, takes tending to. Today, this pot is at its most tender stage. I would ask that you not touch it because it has not been glazed yet, but throughout Advent, this very pot will go through a process. Next week, it will be fired. The week after, it will be glazed. And, lastly, on the fourth Sunday of Advent, it will be completed, and from it, we will give thanks to God for the gift of baptism. The water from this vessel will be sprinkled upon you to remind you that God has tended to your faith with the skill of a Potter. Lastly, the pot will be placed in our prayer room so that it may be enjoyed. I am so thankful that Eric was

willing to be a piece of this Advent alongside us.

### **Slide: Clay Heart**

And, here is my gift to you this Advent. The ushers are now going to pass out to you a piece of modeling clay. (Ushers now pass out clay.) This clay is non-toxic and air drying, so it's not the messy stuff Eric uses, but it's easy for you and/or your children to use during this time of Advent preparation. I would ask that you spend some time creating your own little pot. Mold the clay while thinking about how God is molding you this Advent, and leave this little pot creation of yours somewhere where you can see it these four weeks. When you look at it, give God thanks for working upon you and giving you purpose in life. Contemplate how God is working on you right now.

(Wait for the clay to be passed out)

All of us are muddy dirt creatures. We are clay, molded and transformed by God, to be unique, differing in

culture, color, appearance, and character, and yet united as one people of God, serving one creator. It's humbling to think that we are all the dirt stuff of creation. It's humbling because the start of every pot looks like this one, which strips away our class, race, education, and whatever effort we undertake to look and seem...not like dirt. Yet, clay we are, and when we die, we will not be able to escape that very equalizing fact.

### **Slide: God With Us**

How even more amazing it is then, that God should choose to come to us also of clay in the person of Jesus Christ, that the Potter comes also as the creation, so that God could know and experience being the carbon, the star stuff that we are, so that ultimately, when we are returned to the earth, we are embraced by the One who dared walk, be, and die with and for us. This sense of clay is the mystery of Incarnation - God with us as human vesture. This mystery we contemplate now in this season.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning is now and forever shall be world without end. Amen.