

Wm. Blake Spencer

Molded Again

Jeremiah18:1-6/Hebrews 1:10-14

**What had been whole....broke apart. It is rarely ever expected and most always an unwelcome reality. Actually the process of breaking is not all that complicated. It's surprising how fragile life can be.**

My good friend is a collector of antique porcelain. When I was his neighbor he lived in a 40's style bungalow with wooden floors. I mention this because when you walked into his home the floors were old enough to move a bit, the wooden floor planks and the foundational beams holding them together creaked and popped with each step.

**I mention this because when the floors give and take other things in the room give and take as well. And in my friends house that meant all the hundreds and hundreds of intricately made porcelain....hanging on the walls, sitting in shelves, on tops of tables and propped along plate racks at the tops of the wall would shake and shimmer and bump when walking through the house.**

I mention this because it was often a nerve racking experience to walk into his house, ever afraid that one step of the foot would be the one to cause breakage. I mention this because that is exactly what happened.

I felt horrible. The tiny thin bowl fell to the floor and shattered. And yet my friend was so gracious....eventually!

His first words were, "Oh don't worry, Blake....that thing only cost \$15 when I got it in Paris twenty years ago.....sure it was worth a lot more now...but it didn't cost me much then." **Oh, wow....that made me feel so much better. And then he said, "Look, if I didn't enjoy all these things and I didn't want others to enjoy them...I would pack them up and store them away safely....up in the attic. But that's not the way I want to live. I would rather take the risk and enjoy what I have. So get over it. It's ok."**

Not all things that break apart are so easily dealt with....especially when the breakage has to do with people....even more complicated when involving a group of people like a congregation. It takes a whole lot of focused work to make amends when groups of people "break" apart....and even then making whole again what has broken takes a toll.

**It only took a few months before someone spoke aloud the words that had been whispered in the hall ways and corners of classrooms. An anonymous note taped to the front door of the sanctuary on a Sunday morning proclaimed the hurt feelings and anger.** Like Martin Luther's 95 Thesis nailed to the doors at Wittenberg the little paper note meticulously taped to the newly refinished door... out lined the grievances of the one who had hung it there.

Hand motions during worship, children's art hanging in the sanctuary, money for mission spent on a church wide project, and the fact that the Pastor had not visited in a timely fashion. These were a few of the things scrawled on the paper.

**On a morning set aside for worship....members stood in the Narthex sipping their cups of coffee mumbling in hushed tones as if some Hollywood Star had fallen from grace and they were the paparazzi with the latest news. "Can you believe? Did you hear? What do you think?"**

**And yes, some of the mentioned items on the anonymous note hanging on the front door of the church for all to read had some teeth...others who read the note felt the very same way the anonymous author felt. And with these words the small congregation began to break apart.**

It is never an easy experience....whether it be a congregation or a denomination struggling and wrestling with one another over what is right and what is wrong.....whether it be two friends, or partners, or an entire family caught in the throws of a feud. At times life becomes fragile....even in the midst of people who seem confident and knowledgeable and so very able.

**And this is where Jeremiah comes in. He does not shy away from the fragileness of life....nor does this prophet hesitate to bring to our attention how easily we turn away from God and each other and how bold we become in our justifications as to why we have the right to do so.**

In Jeremiah's day the turning away of God's people seems in our minds more dramatic than any of our turning away....and when seen this way we do not necessarily relate our experiences to these people living 1000's of years ago. We more easily understand why God and God's called prophets are quick to chastise those people of old.....but when we think of our own stories..... we cannot fathom God being upset with our words, our behavior, our justifications.

**This does not mean that bad things in life don't happen....that injustices do not occur. They do. And when they do....it is quite necessary to deal with such matters. But to believe the brokenness accompanying injustice will over power God's desire to heal us....well this is the very stuff of our turning away from God and each other.**

This is when we begin to place more trust in our own reasoning and justifications over and above God's. These are the moments we begin to believe....when life breaks apart there is no putting it back together.

These are those moments in life we are tempted to judge, castigate, and rebuke each other....as if the power was ours to do so....as if the brokenness was ours to forever categorize and define.

**So Jeremiah bursts in on the scene.....and friends he's taking us on a field trip ....hoping we might get a glimpse of the bigger picture. We're going on a field trip y'all....so lift up your heads from out your pew....snap out of your familiar sermon gaze....and lets go to the potters house and learn again how God, the creator, the master potter goes about the work of creating and re-creating all over again.**

If you've ever stood in the work space of a potter you know that it can get a bit messy....this spinning and molding of clay. There will be some splattering so be ready and aware for that to happen. But also be prepared for the beauty of such work....how a ball of clay can instantly rise up into a column and just as quickly spread out into a bowl. The flick of a finger or the gentle move of the potters palm and an entirely new vessel takes shape.

**With such work we get a glimpse into those first moments of creation when God breathed into the dust of the earth and brought forth cells, and molecules and personalities, individuals and entire families. This indeed is the stuff of creation.**

**Potters often talk about the deep spiritual rootedness of their work....how working with clay teaches them about life.**

And like anything in life a potter will tell you....cracks happen....breakage and spillage happen. And if you stand in the potter's workspace long enough you will witness a magnificent piece of work fall apart before your eyes.

**We had taken our Vacation Bible School children on a field trip to a potters work shop. Oh what fun it is to watch a child's reaction as the potter goes about throwing a pot. Of course the potter wanted our children to see the whole process. She patiently answered questions and went about her work.**

And as she spoke we saw a bowl take shape. It happens so quickly. It comes out of nowhere...one moment a ball hidden the palms of her hands and the next a piece of art. It was beautiful. She slowly and gently moved her hands up and the sides of the bowl became thin as paper.

And then the potter jerked her hand and the bowl fell in upon itself...an implosion of sorts. And as children do...they responded with dramatic "Oh no's" and "What happened"! and "What are you going to do now?"

**Of course the potter had done this on purpose. She waited for the wheel to stop spinning and she turned to the children and asked them what they thought should happen now that the beautiful bowl had fallen into a glob. As usual Christian was the first one to speak, blurting out, "You might as well throw that thang away."**

Exactly what the potter wanted to hear. "Oh, no. I don't throw anything away." "But it broke," another little voice hollered from the back of the group. "Yes, it seems that you are right", the potter said.

**And without another word she started spinning her wheel.....taking the glob of clay into her hands again....and within moments another beautiful bowl took shape. As she worked the finishing touches she spoke to the children in a calm, and quiet way. "You see, things do fall apart....but we can always pick them back up....we can always find a way to make something new."**

**And so it is with God. God can always find a way to make something new.....the brokenness coming with experiences.... we define as bad and unjust never have power to have the last word in the midst of God's grace.....no matter how many words we speak or write....no matter how many times we justify our grievances....God stands ready to mold again in us life and community, peace and hope.**

We are taking the first steps into the season of Lent again...a time set aside for us to ponder the brokenness in life...to admit to ourselves how we have turned away from God and each other...to come to terms with our stubbornness to hear or see the newness right before us.

**The journey is chalked full of stories ripe for gleaning wisdom and forgiveness. Some of the stories we remember along the way are difficult ones revealing deep cracks of hurt and pain....but friends sometimes cracks are the only way light can break into our lives.....sometimes the brokenness and cracks are the only way we get a glimpse to a better way.**

Of course there are dark valleys along this journey....of course we don't always sense the way we are going...and some days we simply wear out like an old pair of socks.

But God does not leave us, or turn from us. Like clay in a potters hands...God holds us and molds us again. Like a delicate worn out garment...God gently rolls us up and takes us in.

**My daughter and I have discovered something along the journey and that is this....  
"Change can never erase love." Change can never erase love!**

**God's love will have the last word. Change will occur in life...but God is always present and ready to mold and remold all the stuff of our lives until we find our way to new life...until we once again walk from the darkness of Good Friday into the light and joy of Easter.**

But for now....we journey....we walk and sit and pray and think and ponder....We pray for the courage to confess and the humility to receive forgiveness.

For now we are but a ball of clay...in the palms of God's hands being molded again. All the changes are being folded and rolled into the new creation of God's making.