

**Oak Grove Presbyterian Church**

**Rev. Mary Koon**

**June 19, 2022**

**“Names for God” Series: Potter**

I am really glad to be participating in our series on the names of God. The whole idea came about on Easter week when a few of us had the conversation about the language we use when we pray the Lord’s prayer. I know that for some people, the image of God as Father or even Mother is a challenging one, with history of difficult or hurtful relationships with earthly parents.

For some, of course, the image is one of comfort and solace. But it got us considering that the Bible is full of images and names for God, many of which we seldom or never use in worship. Thus, an idea for a summer series was born, with introductions to alternative and creative interpretations of the Lord’s prayer.

We hope and pray that our imaginations will be sparked as we discover and wonder about the many manifestations, images and names for God, opening us to fresh understandings and ways of being in the world.

So, today we begin with the prophet Jeremiah. In the very first chapter of the book, God calls Jeremiah to preach God’s word to a people, a nation, that was living in difficult times. He lived during one of the most troubled times in Israel’s history, in the decades leading up to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and then followed by the Babylonian exile.

Through it, Jeremiah remained faithful to his call from God preaching, praying, writing. He faced hostility and was ridiculed. God calls Jeremiah to preach to the people, assuring him that God formed him in the womb with holy plans, that God would be with Jeremiah, providing him with words for the people of faith, reminding them to care for the

poor, the orphan, the outcast. To worship with integrity. Imploring them to return to their center in God's ways of grace, love, service.

Our scripture today invites us to see God as artist and artisan. How wonderful that the visual arts are used in the Hebrew Bible! So, in the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter, God speaks these words to the prophet:

**Scripture reading: Jeremiah 18:1–6**

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 'Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words.' 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, as seemed good to him.

Then the word of the LORD came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

The image of the potter would have been a familiar one in ancient times, as villages had different craftspeople working. Our friend and potter, Laurie, demonstrates her process which begins by centering the clay. God is like a potter, and we are like clay in the potter's hands.

As people of faith, it is helpful to be centered in God, or we tend to slip to the side. How easy it is to become uncentered, and how God is always re-orienting us toward God and God's good will for us and the world.

Next, Laurie starts building up the sides, and then messes up. Oh no... now what? She just puts it back on the wheel and starts again. I love this. I wonder if Jeremiah was surprised by this, certainly the potter could have gotten frustrated and just kicked the wheel and walked away. But that's not how the potter responds. It reminds me of forgiveness and how

when we mess up, God forgives, and we can begin again. In baptism, we are cleansed, given gifts of service, welcomed into community and we declare that nothing can keep us from God's love. There is no person that does not have part in what God is doing in the world.

I notice that her "hands" are all over her work. The beauty in every piece, and there is a bit of herself. The very first creation story in Genesis tells us how we, too, are created by God in God's image. And God's hands have left their mark on us. Each person is beautiful, each created for a purpose. In the metaphor of the potter and clay, we are not hardened clay vases, or bowls, but continue pliable in the potter's hands, constantly being re-shaped into the person God imagines us to be.

No one is every beyond redemption. ALL humans are shaped by the Potter/God, and I have hope because we can grow and change. We can receive this name for God as pure grace and respond with gratitude and open hearts. And while it is faithful to consider the metaphor/ name of potter as an individual kind of shaping, in Jeremiah, the potter is shaping a community.

In our own lives and in the life of the church, God is always at work. I love the how our passage started this morning, "Up on your feet! Go to the potter's house. When you get there, I'll tell you what I have to say." Step away from the familiar, from the way you've always done it, God says, so I can show you something new.

It excites me to think about how we as a church can head to the places where God is calling us to go, to learn more about what God wants to tell us about inclusion, antiracism practices, how we are using our resources in the world. For instance, today is Juneteenth. This day commemorates the emancipation of enslaved African Americans and recognizes the news of the end of slavery reaching the state of Texas. I didn't know about it until a few years ago, and our church office has

added it as a holiday. The invitation is as clear today as it was in Jeremiah's day, "On your feet", says God, "Let me show you..."

May the gift of the image of the potter get us wondering. With God as the potter, how then might we be clay? Certainly, God cannot make us do or be anything. But as we remain supple throughout our lives, those times we may make poor choices, or face challenging circumstances, or face deep grief, God is ever at the ready to re-shape.

Our faith tradition offers us ways to remain moldable, pliable and open to the ways God wants to shape us. Ancient practices like silence, prayer, artistic expressions, faithful conversations, scripture reading come to mind. Laughter and tears. Grief and celebration. Forgiving one another and ourselves.

Together with God and one another, may we always be open to God's artistic touch in our lives. Go in peace into the world as agents of change, ever being molded into the likeness of Jesus. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be yours this day and every day. AMEN

God of Justice, God of Healing, God of Love, hear our prayer. We are grateful for life and breath, for art and music, for friendship and family, for summer warmth and lush foliage. We are thankful for blessings great and small, for moments of grace, and peace, for the beauty of nature, for the laughter of children.

On this day when we celebrate Fathers, we acknowledge that it brings joy to some and heartbreak to others, and to some a little of both. We thank you for those who have nurtured us along the way. We pray for fathers who mourn the loss of children by death or estrangement and all who struggle with relationships. Bring healing and hope to your people.

God, we pour your blessings out upon this church as we welcome children this week to hear your word and learn your ways. We thank you for each volunteer who will give generously of their time, each child that will be present and every family who will entrust their children with us. Help us create a week of deepening relationships, fun and learning.

On this Juneteenth, we remember the day the slaves in Texas finally heard of their emancipation, we still cry out to you and pray to remain open to be used by you to help end all slavery, racism, voter suppression, greed, hate, violence, poverty, denial of health care, environmental injustice, war and the false religion of white supremacy and white nationalism.

Potter God, free us from apathy and inaction. Open our eyes. Mold us and make us. Call us into action to bring an end to the injustices that are contrary to your way. In all things make us instruments of your peace. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, our brother, teacher, and friend.