

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota
 November 30, 2014

Isaiah 64:1-9
 Mark 13:24-37
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

This morning kids, I have a picture entitled "**All God's Critters Got A Place in the Choir.**" Do you see all the different kinds of animals in the picture? Do you see all the different kinds of people in the picture? We have been singing the "**All God's Critters**" song each week in worship. It has been a reminder to us that **God made and loves everybody** in the world. It also reminds us that **God welcomes and loves everybody** who wants to come to be a part of God's faith family at First Lutheran.

Our theme for the past few weeks has been "**Serving All God's People.**" In our lesson from **Isaiah** for today, we hear that "**God is the potter and we are the clay.**" What do you think that means? Could it mean:

- God **formed us** to start with, just like we can make stuff out of Play doe?
- God has a **plan** for how God would like to see our lives turn out?
- God, everyday, is working in our lives to **shape us**?
- God has **hopes and dreams** for the kind of person we might become?

Kids, God **made you**. God **loves you**. God hopes that you will have a **wonderful life**. God hopes that you will **help others** to have a wonderful life too.

Kids, I am going to send a tiny package of Play doe home with you today. I would like you to make a **tiny figure to be you**. Notice how all the clays come from **different colors**. When you shape your Play doe you may make a **tall, slender** person. You may make a **short, stalky** person like me. You may make a **red** person, or **yellow**, or **blue**. You may put a **smile** on your face. You may be **sitting**, standing, jumping...

In the Bible it says that we are made in the "**image**" of God. That doesn't mean we look like God. It means that we've been made to be in a **loving relationship** with God. So, if you want to make your little clay symbol of yourself look a little bit like God, I would put a **big heart** on the chest. God **loves you very much**. And God hopes that you **love God back**. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Over Thanksgiving I had the opportunity to spend three nights in the same house as my five-month-old grandson, Anders. On previous visits, I have really only seen him for short periods and he has always been happy and peaceful. During the past couple of days, Anders has awakened his parents with piercing wails three or four times each night – time for feeding, diaper change or simply to play. This experience reminds me of the Lutheran belief that we are born **sinful by nature**. For babies, it is all about me. Nobody matters but me.

But, **faith** is there too. That little guy is totally dependent upon the love and care of his young parents for survival and for whatever follows. He has to trust them to take care of him.

The first time I got to rock Anders in my arms, prior to all the crying, I wondered to myself what this five month old will be like when he gets to be 15. His parents will have a huge amount to do with that. His grandparents some... The world a whole lot more... What kinds of hopes and dreams do young parents have for their children? What kind of blood, sweat and tears will they need to share in order for that little one to grow and prosper as a **human being**? How about as a **child of God**? Who will help with that?

What are God's hopes and dreams for you, for us, for this world? And how does God care for God's children?

We hear about this in our text from **Isaiah 64**. God's people, Israel, have been allowed to return to their home country after years of exile in foreign lands. They have been working to rebuild their temple and their lives. Things have not gone very well. They have experienced ruin, conflict and famine. In our passage, they are once again crying out to God for deliverance.

The text goes something like this:

- God, can we **count on you**?
- You **helped** us before and **good things happened**.
- You've been **faithful** in the past and we are **hopeful** again.
- We **haven't been trusting** you **very well** Lord. As a matter of fact, we haven't been trusting you **much at all**... We are **hopeless sinners**... Just like all of our ancestors...

- But, **“O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.”**
- And finally, **“Now consider, we are all your people.”**

There comes the **promise, the hopeful word**. They have captured the essence of the faith. We are the **work of God’s hands**. We are the **people that God has created** to love and care for. We are the people that God invites to love and trust God. We are the people God has created to love and care for the earth and neighbor.

Good is going to happen because we are **God’s people** and God is **not going to give up on us**. That’s why, after hundreds of years of human failure to trust God, **Jesus came**. Jesus lived in our shoes, died on the cross and rose again. He **showed us the heart of God**, the heart that loves us to the death and beyond – sinners though we are. Then Jesus **returned to heaven**...

In our Gospel lesson for today, **Jesus promises** that he is coming again. And he also promises:

- He will, once and for all, **bring rescue** for God’s people and the whole earth.
- **Life, growth and joy await** for all of God’s people, for all of eternity.
- **Everything** in creation will be **altered except for God’s Word** of promise.
- **Be ready**. We hear **“keep awake/alert”** three times. Only God knows when the last day will be...

If you trust in God for your life and salvation, this is **tremendously good news**! God is going to **make things right**. God is going to **rescue you** and all believers. If God can change the whole earth, the whole creation, **just imagine what God can do with people’s lives right now**. With your life and family. With your work and world. **Is God, right now, at work in your life?** Has God, maybe since your birth, been molding and shaping the person that you have become? Has God been working in the lives of my son and daughter-in-law? Is God working in the life of my little, grandson, Anders? Do you believe that God loves and cares about you?

If you’ve been in worship the last few weeks, you’ve been hearing a lot of scripture passages where God calls upon God’s people to **give**... We have

mentioned the word “**tithe**” which is the Old Testament vision of giving back to God **10%** of all that God has first given to us. A recent speaker at Luther Seminary said that encouraging people to tithe **makes it seem like God only cares about** the **10%** we plan to give to God. The speaker went on to argue that God cares more about the **90%** that we keep.

God wants our hearts, not just our money. God wants all of our lives – who we are, what we do, where we go. God longs for each and all of us to **totally trust our whole lives** into the **hands of God the divine potter**. This is how God moves to give us the best lives possible in this world. And, just like the people of Israel; some days we do better at trusting God than others.

We are near the end of our annual stewardship drive – “**Serving All God’s People**.” Stewardship isn’t so much about the money we give. It is far more about us **trusting God**. If it takes a lot of faith on your part to return **\$1/week** to God’s hands, **then, yes, do it!** If \$1 is easy, but **\$5** requires a lot of faith in God from you, then, yes, do it! If \$5 is easy, but giving **2%** of your income requires you to stretch your trust in God, then, yes, do it! If committing **5%** of your income to Christ’s mission requires a lot of faith, then yes, do it! **One dollar/week given regularly** adds up to far more than \$10 given two or three times a year. Whatever amount you commit to giving to the mission of God’s church here in this place **will do more for you than it does for the mission**. You “**need to give**” more than the mission “**needs to receive**.” God **created us to be givers**, blessed to be a blessing. When we **give ourselves away**, we are **trusting God to take care of us**. **That’s where we find life – in trusting God**.

My **past few sermons** have been challenging us all to trust God with our money. **All year round**, I preach about **trusting God with our lives** – and those lives include our families, our homes, our work, our recreation, our health, our happiness and our money...

Will you pray that God will have God’s way in:

- Your life,
- Our lives,
- Our church,
- Our mission with Jesus
 - o That we might love and care for those entrusted to us here,

- That we might reach out to embrace those beyond our doors?

Will you pray?

We are human. My grandson, Anders, is causing his parents some **major, night-time stress and sleeplessness**. He will likely still be causing them stress and sleeplessness when he is 15. His parents have huge and wonderful hopes and dreams for that little guy. So does God.

We are human. God also has huge and wonderful hopes and dreams for each and every one of us. We will **sometimes bring great blessing to God**. We will **sometimes bring great pain and disappointment** to God. And **God will faithfully love and care for us through it all and forever**.

Pastor Amanda Kempthorne, from Lord of Life Lutheran Church, North Pole, Alaska shares the following story.

One early November night, my family was heading to a friend's home for pizza and games and general merriment. My twelve-year-old self had the **responsibility and honor of carrying our homemade pizza**. I was two steps away from their front door when my foot landed on ice and I dumped the pizza, topping side down, on the front walk.

God has entrusted into our hands something much more valuable than pizza... **What kind of God puts something as precious as the Good News into our frail, shaky hands? Apparently, God finds us more trustworthy and capable than we may find ourselves**. (Taken from "God Pause for Friday, 11/14/2014, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN)

Today, dear friend, **you carry Jesus**. And far better yet, **Jesus carries you**. Thanks be to God. Amen.