

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota
November 20, 2016

Galatians 6:7-10
Ephesians 3:14-21
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

KIDS' MESSAGE

Kids, I am going to give each of you a little can of **PlayDoh**. I would like you to sculpt/mold/shape a **likeness of yourself**. **Pretend** that **you are God**. Pretend that the **PlayDoh is you**.

Before you came to be **in your mother's tummy**, God had you in mind. **God dreamt of creating you** and giving you to your family. **God shaped** you in your mother's tummy. When you were **born**, God was there to bring you safely into this world.

When you were **baptized**, God made the sign of the cross on your forehead and named you "**Child of God, Christian**." And that day God **gave you to us** so that we could love and care for you too. And God has created you with a **heart for loving and caring** for **God**, your **family** and **God's whole big, wonderful world**.

God has shaped you to have all of your **own interests, joys, hopes and dreams**. God has given you a **wonderful family**. God has given you **talents** to do wonderful things. God has **promised to love and care** for you forever.

Do you like the person God has created you to be? I thank God for each and for all of you. And I pray that God will be able to keep on doing wonderful things in your lives. God is still working to shape you every day.

Here is the person that I sculpted. His name is **Darrell Pedersen**. I gave him a **cross** on his forehead to show that he is a child of God. And I gave him a **big heart** so that he can love God, other people and God's amazing world. **Have fun pretending** to be God and shaping your little person. I know that God has had a lot of fun shaping beautiful you. Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE
God is the Potter. We are the clay.
Sculpting our church with **community.**

Every person, deep down inside, longs to be a part of a caring community. At a workshop, retired **Pastor George Gilbertson** from Grand Rapids shared this experience with us. His adult daughter and her three kids, ages 6, 4 and 2½, decided to play **hide-and-go-seek** in George's horse barn. The 2½ year old said she wanted to hide with Grandpa. Mommy began counting and Grandpa George and the kids ran into the barn. George's little granddaughter chose for the two of them to hide in a vacant stall. They scrunched down in one corner as best they could. Soon the counting ended, "**Here I come, ready or not.**"

George and his granddaughter could hear Mommy going from corner to corner searching the barn. Mommy took too long. All of a sudden, George's little hiding partner called out, "**Mommy, come and find me. I'm over here.**" This little one and Grandpa were found with great delight. **How glad this little girl was to be found.** She really didn't want to be hiding from her mom. **She wanted to be in her mom's loving embrace.** How many people are waiting to be found, embraced and loved by their compassionate parent, God, and by their sisters and brothers in Christ? People don't just wander in here for worship. Those who have been here before return again and again to be a part of God's great family reunion which begins here and will last forever in heaven. Those who have not been here before often come because something big has happened in their life and they are looking to see if there **really is a God**. They are looking to see if God's children **really do care about each other**. And they are looking to see if God's family **really does welcome the stranger** into their midst.

What is God up to amongst us today? How many times have you heard me say this? "**At any given worship service, I've got it figured that about every third one of us has some sort of major struggle, challenge or crisis going on?**" No one is exempt. Everyone faces the challenges of a difficult world. I've always said, when trouble happens, the only questions are, "**Whose turn is it today?**" And, "**What are 'you'**

going to do about it?” Today, maybe I **would add one more question.**
 “When trouble arises in **“your”** life, what are **“we”** going to do about it?”

When Jesus started the Christian church 2,000 years ago, he was working with a dozen fellows that had varying degrees of faith and understanding. They doubted, denied and sold him out. Then there were a bunch of women working behind the scenes, unofficially, since women were not considered to be important back then. They were more faithful to Jesus.

So, what does the Christian church look like today? Please watch the following video with me. It was done by **Cleveland Medical Center.** Maybe you will see yourself in there someplace? (SHOW VIDEO.)

Our video reflects the reality that every person carries their own set of baggage, some good things and some very difficult. The video asks, **“What if you knew every person’s life circumstances** – cancer, divorce, expecting a baby, overwhelmed by bills, in constant pain – if you knew their circumstances, **would you treat them any differently?**”

At one point in his ministry, Jesus surveyed the crowds that often flocked to hear him, and he said, **“They are like sheep without a shepherd,”** no one to care for and protect them. And then we are told Jesus had **“compassion”** on them. His **heart went out to them.** Jesus came into this world because **God’s heart goes out for us.** That crew of hurting and needy people two thousand years ago - **Jesus welcomed, loved, fed, forgave, empowered with hope** and then **turned them into the Holy Christian Church,** the Body of Christ. We are the descendents of that crowd who desperately needed someone to love and care for them. We all need that Good Shepherd to love and care for us as well.

The people we saw in the video, each of us gathered here in this sanctuary, the folks listening over the radio or watching on television – God knows each and every one of **us by name, loves and cares for us** and is **always moving to bring about the best good** in each and all of our lives. And, **God invites you and me** to **know, love and care for each other** and **all these others** as well.

God **saves us** – draws us close to God and to each other. Then God **shapes us** into a **vital community.** Then God **empowers us** to serve together as an amazing **source for God’s healing, life-giving love.** First

God works to **build up the beloved Body of Christ**. Then God moves to **welcome new people to also become beloved parts of that body**.

Paul described the Christian church, the **community of God's people**, as being the sort of place where **if one suffers, we all suffer** with them. And where **if one rejoices/celebrates, we all rejoice/celebrate** with them.

In our lesson from Paul's letter to the **Galatians**, we are told, "**You reap whatever you sow**." When God's people **plant love and care** for one another and the world, we **also reap/receive love and care** returned into our own lives. Paul says, "**So let us not grow weary in doing what is right**." Paul calls "**doing right**" an "**opportunity**." We are, since Abraham in ancient days, "**blessed to be a blessing**." Paul says, "**Let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith**." What **unique and needed blessing** do you bring to God's people gathered here? What unique and needed blessing do you have to share with the strangers that you encounter out there?

In our reading from **Ephesians**, Paul tells us that **God**, as the creator and source of life, **names every family**. God is that close to us. And in this creation, God is **planting a garden of love** – in individual lives and in the whole family of faith, the church. We are **given power** in our inner being to **comprehend** the breadth and length and height and depth of the **love of Christ which surpasses knowledge**. All of this is done that we might be **filled with all the fullness of God**. And when we are **filled with God**, God can **accomplish abundantly far more** in us and through us than all we can ask or imagine. And when that happens, Paul says, "**all glory goes to God** in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

When we love, care and serve, we bring glory to God and we accomplish good things in this needy world. Here in this part of the Body of Christ, this faith family, First Lutheran, **we are loving, caring and serving together**. Thanks for the time, talent and money that you share with and through this faith family.

Our numbers will be down in worship this weekend. Some of our family members are gone to **Jamaica** on a mission trip. Some of us are attending the **Middle School Youth Gathering** at Cragun's Resort. Some are in the

nursing home. Some are working. Some are out of town visiting relatives. Some are in jail.

When Pastor Bob visits someone in jail, as a part of this faith family, you are there with him. When I lead worship at one of our nursing homes, you are there with me. When your pastor attends a school event to support and encourage our kids, you are right there with me. When Glen Schmeltzer sings old time karaoke songs at the nursing home, we are all there with him. When our parish nurses take blood pressure readings – all of us. When our Befrienders visit a grief stricken person – all of us. When our mentors listen to the highs and lows of a high school freshmen – all of us. When a Prayer Shawl is lovingly made and then placed on the shoulders of someone who is sick – all of us. When you are applauded on your birthday or anniversary – all of us. When the Prayer Chain is started for someone receiving cancer treatment in some distant hospital – all of us. When we post newspaper clippings about the activities of our members, our kids – all of us. When we display photos of those who wish to call this their faith family, they are a part of – all of us. When you are expecting a baby and we pray for you – all of us. When you are serving in the military and we pray for you – all of us. When you have lost a loved one and we hug you – all of us. When you are in trouble and need a hand – all of us. When we pay for our kids to go to Bible camp – all of us. When we say to caring groups from our community, “You are welcome to use this place for free” – all of us. When we make a plan for how this church is going to make a life-changing difference in the year ahead – all of us. Thanks for the time, talent and money that you share with and through this faith family – all of us.

When trouble arises in your life, Jesus is here for you. So are we, the Body of Christ. So when trouble arises, don't play hide-and-go-seek. Come home to the loving embrace of Jesus and your family in faith.

We are a faith family, a community, the Body of Christ, sisters and brothers of Jesus. God has drawn us together here in this place. God faithfully loves and cares for us individually and together. And together, we do the best we can to love God back, and to love and care for each other and the stranger. Pretty good plan that God has for – all of us. Thanks for being a part of – all of us. Thanks be to God. Amen.