

**Salem Lutheran Church**

Pastor Jon Enter

SalemLutheran.org

**Theme: Form Me, Lord**

Text: Isaiah 64:4-5,8-9

**“We are the clay, You are the Potter; we are all the work of Your hand.”** (Isaiah 64:8) How true those words of Isaiah are! This divinely instructed illustration through the pen of Isaiah was great for the Israelites because Jewish towns had a potter, if not several. There were no commercialized “Pottery Barns” or “People’s Pottery” stores back then. The Israelites went the corner pottery store, Bob’s Pottery—well it was probably Bobbiah’s Pottery—to get some bowls to eat meals out of. What was a familiar sight for the Israelites is nearly unseen for us. Besides a high school art class or the movie *Ghost*, we don’t see a potter at work.

I don’t want us to miss the point of Isaiah’s powerful illustration since we’re unfamiliar with forming pottery. So, I did some research on the subject. Before shaping the clay on the wheel, a potter must knead his clay to rid it of impurities and air. He “wedges” it—slicing it in half slamming the halves back together to force out air bubbles. When he feels the clay is ready, the potter next throws the ball of clay down on a spinning horizontal wheel with some water. Water, I’ve discovered, is key to making clay workable. Then the potter “masters” the clay, forming it by his touch. These pottery pieces were hand made by a potter at the Renaissance Festival in Minnesota. In the hands of a skilled potter, beautiful and functional pieces of art are made.

If you’ve ever sat at a potter’s wheel, you know how difficult it is. In fact, the terminology of this craft reveals the difficulty. The terms *force*, *master* and *throw* imply that clay is not always easy to work with. Often a partially formed object will disintegrate into a shapeless heap of clay. When this happens, the potter has two choices. He can sweep the clay off the wheel and into the garbage in disgust or he can add more water—again, water is key—making the clay easier to reform.

In the hands of our God, who is skilled beyond all measure, beautiful and functional pieces of art have been and continue to be made. God’s loving hands formed Adam and Eve. **“The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being... Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man.”** (Genesis 2:7,22) Our sermon text reminds us that not only were Adam and Eve lovingly formed by the Lord; we are too. **“We are the clay, You are the Potter; we are all the work of Your**

**hand.”** (Isaiah 64:8) Psalm 119:73 declares we are the work of the Lord, **“Your hands formed me and made me.”**

God also formed the world, **“The sea is His for He made it and His hands formed the dry land.”** (Psalm 95:5) Everything we see when we open our eyes—the ocean and owls, the crocodiles and canaries, the palm trees and palmetto bugs (could’ve done without the palmetto bugs)—is formed by the Lord with one exception. One big exception. God did not create sin. We sinned. We, God’s clay, rebelled against the Potter. When the world disintegrated into sin, God had two choices. He could have swept His creation into the trashcan or He could reform it. The Lord in love chose to reform His creation. He picked up the world in His grace-filled hands and made a promise; the promise to save the world from its imperfections of sin. Today, as we take another step into the Advent season of the church year, we focus on the coming of that Promised Savior—a Savior who would make us easier to work with by taking away the imperfection of our sins. With Jesus’ help and forgiveness, we cry out to the Potter, *“Form me, Lord!”*

We aren’t the only ones who needed to be reformed. Isaiah realized the Israelites had a desperate need for a trip back to the Potter’s wheel. He cried out to the Lord in our text, **“When we continued to sin against [Your ways], You were angry. How then can we be saved?”** The Israelites were constantly falling away from God disintegrating into sin and then repenting; only to fall away again. Isaiah couldn’t figure out where God was going with this. In Isaiah’s 64<sup>th</sup> chapter, he basically asks the question, *“Where in the world is God?”* Some Israelites had returned home from exile only to discover their temple in ruins, property destroyed and the people who weren’t hauled off into exile as hardened unbelievers. With all of these negatives, Isaiah wondered how the Israelites could be restored to the great nation which was to be as numerous as the sand on the seashore and a blessing to all peoples? (Genesis 22:17-18) Isaiah couldn’t see it. He actually wondered and worried, **“How then can we be saved?”** *“Where in the world is God?”*

Just this week I was talking with a member going through a crisis and that question came up, *“Where’s God? I don’t see God in all of this? I don’t understand Him.”* That sounds familiar, doesn’t it? It’s something that has happened to us all. When life is upside down, when we are feeling split apart from the inside out, when we are slammed up against life, against anguish, against the unknown, it’s easy to question God, the Potter, wondering what He is doing?

We join Isaiah in questioning God, the Potter, who formed us. Isaiah and the Israelites were confused and upset with how God had left their restoration from captivity “unfinished”. Or so they thought. We complain that God too has left us unfinished. We look in the mirror, at what God formed, and often quarrel with our Maker. *“Why did you make me like this?”* When a health problem isn’t restored how *we* thought best, we question our Lord’s will. When we’re dissatisfied with the talents (or lack of talents) we possess, we, the clay, say to our Lord, the Potter, *“What have you made? Why aren’t I like that?”* Pointing at someone better, smarter, thinner, prettier, buffer, more athletic, more popular or more successful. We all have something or many things happen in our lives that make us wonder, *“Why did God do that?”* We quarrel with the Lord over how “unfinished” our lives are. Isaiah 45:9 reveals the danger of this disgust. **“Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker...Does the clay say to the Potter, ‘What are you making?’”** Woe to us. Seriously, woe to us when we join the Israelites in questioning God, not being thankful for God personally, lovingly forming us.

When we, God’s clay, disintegrate into sin, God has two choices. He can sweep us off His Potter’s wheel into the trash or reform us. In His mercy, He lovingly forms us anew. Just like a human potter who adds water to the clay to make it formable, God, our Potter, added Christ, the Living Water, to make us formable. When Christ is poured into our lives through baptism and by drinking in the grace of God in the Holy Scriptures, our impurities are washed away. Jesus, the Promised Savior, did what He was promised to do. He died on the accursed tree and removed the sins of the world. When Christ the Living Water is personally applied to our impurities—our quarrelling and our questioning—we are renewed, reformed, forgiven.

We know the answer to Isaiah’s lament, **“How then can we be saved?”** Isaiah and the Israelites had to wait for that Savior to be born. You and I have entered the season of Advent when we eagerly await the *celebration* of the Savior’s birth on Christmas. Bu we know that Savior was born nearly 2,000 years ago. Through that Savior, the shout, *“Form me, Lord!”* does not go unheard. In fact, it is answered.

God does reform us by forgiving us. Because we are renewed spiritually, that doesn’t mean we are renewed physically. We might not be formed how we’d like but we are formed how God wants us. What we need to realize is that we are tremendous blessings just as we are.

A water carrier had two large clay pots, each pot hung on either end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in

it while the other was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master’s house. The cracked pot arrived only half full.

For a full two years this went on daily, with the water carrier delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his master’s house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its imperfection and was miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do. After two years, the cracked pot thought its life was a bitter failure. It spoke to the water carrier one day by the stream, *“I am ashamed of myself and I want to apologize to you.”* *“Why?”* asked the water carrier. *“What are you ashamed of?”* *“I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because of this crack in my side causes water to lead out all the way back to your master’s house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work and you don’t get full value from your efforts.”* The pot said. The water carrier felt sorry for the old cracked pot and in his compassion he said, *“As we return to the master’s house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path.”* Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it was still upset because it had leaked out half its load and so again it apologized to the water carrier for its failure.

The water carrier said to the pot, *“Did you notice there were flowers only on YOUR side of the path but not the other side? That’s because I have always known about your flaw and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path and every day while we walk back from the stream, you’ve watered them. For two years, I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master’s table. Without you being just the way you are, He would not have the beauty of the flowers to grace his house.”*

Each of us has our own unique flaws. We’re all cracked pots. Sometimes we’re cracked physically, at least in our own eyes. But our Loving Creator has a purpose for each of us no matter how physically or emotionally cracked we are. When we get cracked spiritually, we disintegrate into sins, we cry out in repentance. *“Form me, Lord!”* God, the Potter, does just that. He adds Christ the Living Water to us removing our impurities and sins. God then forms us back to Christians set with a purpose—to follow His ways. **“We are the clay, You are the Potter; we are all the world of Your hand.”** Amen.

## GROWTH GROUPS QUESTIONS

Isaiah 64:45-8-9

### GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

What is your favorite piece of pottery in your home? What gives it significance to you?

### INTO THE WORD

What do you know about the prophet Isaiah? When did he live? What was his ministry focus? What was his most famous chapter? (Google “Facts about the Prophet Isaiah” to get help if you need it.)

Fun fact: Isaiah is quoted more than 50 times in the New Testament! Why do you think his book is quoted so often?

**“You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways.”** What are some of your favorite stories of deliverance from God recorded in the Bible? Why did you pick those accounts of God’s merciful power?

**“When we continued to sin against them, you were angry.”** What are some stories of God’s judgment in the Bible that were shocking?

### INTO MY LIFE

Did you take a pottery class in school or for fun? What made it difficult? What was fun about the experience? (If no one has tried making pottery, what kept you from experiencing it?)

When have you felt smashed and worked over like a lump of clay?

**“We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”** What is something about yourself that you once didn’t appreciate but now you see how God blessed you through it?

**“Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD.”** God is angry over sin; he is perfect. What are several ways this verse gives you comfort?

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