

Devotion, Week of June 2, 2024

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

This past Sunday I preached on the 2 Corinthians 4 text “Treasure in Clay Jars.” That got me thinking about pottery. My sister-in-law is a potter, and I’ve watched her several times “throwing a pot.” It’s fascinating. She plops this plain, gray, round blob of clay on a wheel, and as she begins to operate the wheel, her hands begin to shape a basic shape. At first, I’m not sure what it will be – a bowl or mug or vase or pitcher. But eventually she puts her fingers in the middle of the blob and begins to hollow out a shape, and then she begins to refine it with height, and width. I begin to see a bowl, perhaps, taking shape. There’s an incredible art to this shaping – you don’t want a lopsided result, and it needs to be fairly uniform.

I don’t know how she does it, but suddenly as she works up and down and inside and out, there’s a bowl that is symmetrical. Sometimes she’s no satisfied, so she squishes the whole thing back down and starts over, perhaps adding a little water to keep the clay pliable. When she’s satisfied with it, she sets it aside to dry. And then she glazes. The glazes are wonderful – my favorite is a soft green. I have a few coffee mugs where the inside is this shiny, slick green, and the outside is a shiny white, with a little of the green around the upper lip. Some of her glazes are rough, with stylized birds on them. Some are so shiny you can almost see your reflection in them. Each piece of pottery goes in the kiln, where they are “fired,” with temperatures up to 2500 degrees Fahrenheit. Then after the appropriate time, the kiln is turned off and the pottery has to cool – often for several days. Then out come the treasures – you get to see what colors the glazes ended up being after firing. There’s an occasional breakage, but most are just beautiful.

Paul talks about treasures, meaning the glory of God in Jesus Christ, inside their human, “clay jar” bodies. But when I see one of these pieces of pottery, I’m reminded that the jar itself is a work of art. It may get broken, but it was created by loving hands, just like God created us in God’s image with loving hands. God reached into the mud and created Adam and breathed life into humankind. May we thank our creator for the gift of our “clay jar” bodies.

Jeanne