

The Potter and the Clay

[Mark 13:24-37, Isaiah 64:1-9](#)

As we enter into the season of Advent, we are reminded to prepare in a number of ways. Our anticipation is on two fronts – we look forward to the coming of Christmas, the celebration of Jesus' birth. We also look forward to the time when Christ returns to earth. So we prepare.

This is a good time to do some soul-searching. The prophet Isaiah petitions God to come down and once again interact with God's people. The people of Israel had heard many stories of how God was an active participant in their ancestor's lives. God helped rescue Israel from slavery in Egypt. God made a covenant with Israel in the wilderness. God led them into the promised land. Yet for many years God appeared absent from God's people. Israel had turned to sin and forgotten God's covenant. So Isaiah pleads with God to come down to earth.

There is a very popular TV game show called ‘The Price Is Right’. Although Bob Barker is no longer the host, I believe the show is still on the air. When you get a ticket to the show, you are automatically entered into the pool of possible contestants. The announcer shouts out, “Anna Lopez, come on down! You’re the next contestant on the Price is Right!” And Anna gets up, runs down the aisle (sometimes with great hysterics), and gets to compete with other contestants to see if she can get to come on stage and win some big prizes. But it all starts with the petition, “come on down”. This is what Isaiah is doing in our Hebrew Bible scripture. He petitions God to come down and take an active role in the fate of humankind.

Obviously Isaiah needs to petition Israel as well to basically get right with God again. Isaiah refers to God as the potter and to us as the clay. I have never been one to work with

clay, but as I understand it, clay is pulled from the earth and mixed with water to make it pliable – that is the only way you can work with it. If you mix too much water it becomes a gooey mess. If you don't mix enough water, the clay breaks and cracks apart because it is too rigid. When the mixture is just right, a potter can begin molding the clay into useful objects.

Occasionally the potter encounters imperfections in the clay. There may be a hard place that needs to be removed or softened. Sometimes an air bubble gets trapped in the mold and has to be worked out. If these imperfections are left in the vessel, it may not withstand the firing process. If the vessel does withstand the fire, the imperfection becomes a weak point – a slight bit of pressure and the vessel could break.

Part of our Christian journey involves God's sanctifying grace. We've talked about the three types of grace noted as part

of our Methodist heritage. The first is God's prevenient grace – it is always there and available to us. The second is God's justifying grace, as we accept God's grace for ourselves. The third is God's sanctifying grace, as we strive to be more like Christ in our Christian walk. As we continue through the sanctifying process, the potter continues to shape us into useful vessels. Sometimes the clay mixture isn't quite right – we are either too brittle or too wavering, so sometimes God has to make some adjustments. This may come in various forms – even as a wake-up call to put you on an entirely different career path (as experienced by your pastor!)

Once we are in the right frame of mind, God begins to work with us, molding us and shaping us toward the creation of a perfect vessel. In this process, God may find some hard place that needs to be softened. Perhaps we may hold on to old hurts

and we need to let go, or we fail to trust God completely. At times God may find some obstacle that needs to be removed. Perhaps we are working more to build up treasures on earth, forgetting to lay aside treasures in heaven, or perhaps we need to let go of an addiction. God may encounter an air bubble in our clay – a place where we have surrounded ourselves with a security blanket to keep others, especially God, out of our zone. But through this sometimes difficult process, God is with us. God wants us to be strong enough for the fire.

As Isaiah petitioned God to come down and interact with God's people, so we are petitioned to make ourselves right with God. Our first step is to invite God to come down and be a part of our Christian walk. Our second step is to allow God to mold us as a potter molds clay, to be a strong and useful vessel. The

gospel of Mark reminds us of our third step – to watch and be ready for Jesus’ return.

So we prepare. It is hard not to notice the world’s preparations for the Christmas season. Decorations start appearing before Halloween. Thanksgiving gets lost in the shuffle as the countdown to Christmas begins! It is a big deal – and when you are preparing for a big deal you start early!

Valley View Farms in Hunt Valley Maryland begins decorating for Christmas in August – no kidding! And guess what? It IS a big deal! God sent his son to earth in the form of a baby, not as a king with riches and power and awe. Jesus was sent to reveal God’s plan for us – we are here to serve God by serving others.

Throughout the season of Advent, we use a lot of symbols to remind us of our preparation for Christ’s arrival on earth. The wreath and its candles are the visual focus of Advent. One of the

candles is lit each week as Christmas approaches. The circle of the Advent wreath has no beginning and no end. It portrays for us God's timelessness and God's eternal plan of salvation. The evergreen color denotes eternal life that we are granted when we come to know Christ as our Lord and Savior. The shape of the wreath is round, reminding us of the fellowship of believers around the world who share with us the celebration of Christ's coming.

The four outer candles represent the gifts of Christ's spirit in us, which are: Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. You will notice three of the candles are purple. This color reminds us of sorrow and repentance. One of the candles is pink, which reminds us of joy.

The center candle is called the Christ candle. If you will notice, there are the Greek letters of alpha and omega, designating Christ's name as found in the book of Revelation. Also there is a symbol in the middle, which looks like a cross that is combined

with the letter “P.” This symbol is a combination of the two Greek letters “chi” and “rho” which are the first two letters of the name of Christ in the Greek language. This was a symbol used in the early church to represent Jesus Christ. The Christ candle will be lit during our Christmas Eve service.

Today we begin to center ourselves on God as we prepare to remember Jesus’ humble birth in Bethlehem. We also prepare our hearts for the return of Jesus to earth in final victory. The Potter (God) continues to work on us to make us perfect, useful vessels, ready to serve God by helping others in our community, both near and far. It all starts with our acceptance of Jesus as our guide and savior. When we petition God to ‘come on down’, we can experience a relationship with our Maker. Let us use the Advent season to prepare for the celebration of the coming of Christ into the world. Amen.