1 Advent All Saints’

December 3, 2017 Year B

Isaiah 64:1-9 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18 Mark 13:24-37

Come Lord Jesus, Come. Stir within us your Advent Light. Amen

“O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.”

The idea of God as the potter and we as the clay is both reassuring and frightening.

On one hand, the intimacy of being molded by God is precious. God attends to each and every one of us- knitting us together in our mother’s wombs, shaping us by hand, by inspiration, and by hope, all through the Spirit of love, of crazy love. God is madly in love with us. We are created through God’s promise of steadfastness, no matter what. God never abandons us.

As the psalmists insist, God searches for us, pursues us, knows us, our sitting down and our rising up, who discerns our thoughts from far away, and who is acquainted with all our ways. God draws us out from our desolate pits, out of miry bogs and sets our feet upon a rock, making our steps secure.

God puts a new song in our mouths, delighted by our lives, our beauty, and our power to love. This is Good News. Sometimes, too good to be true. How did this happen? We don’t deserve this gift that keeps on giving, but by God’s grace, it’s all true!

Yet on the other hand, the intimacy of being molded by God is frightening. Have you ever seen a potter at his wheel? With all that water, and wet clay, and spinning? ***The way*** the clay is thrown down, molded, and changed and charged and casted into something completely new can take your breath away.

I can look back on my life, and remember the times I have said, “No Thank You God; I don’t really want to be shaped by you right now. Go away!”

Those times for me usually focus on truth telling- when I was facing my family’s pervasive alcoholism, my dying marriage, my good friend’s early onset of dementia.

I didn’t want to name the truth of what was before me, but God took me into God’s hands and formed me in such a way as to see with fresh eyes. I did not want to accept this new reality- the ugly truth of it all. I have to admit, I have prayed literally and earnestly for God to go away- go pick on someone else. Leave me alone. I don’t want You in my life right now.

I can look back and know that that dissatisfaction, discontent, and disappointment was a holy dissatisfaction, a sacred discontent, a blessed disappointment, as I was being shaped in my hindering, in all that I was mired in, by God’s ***belief*** in my nakedness. My vulnerability was not an occasion for shame, but rather one for dignity and empathy.

Just this past Friday, Sandi and I went to Tilton to spend time with four young women who are living a year in service through the Episcopal Service Corps- Baily, Niambi, Sandy and Anna. They have traveled from near and far to live in community, to serve, to mature in their faith, and to discern their next steps. Ostensibly, we were there to teach, but they gave us so much more in return.

One of my favorite moments was when they were talking about being “marinated” by God, slowly and surely, like a cucumber becoming a pickle. And once you are a pickle, there’s no turning back. You’re never a cucumber, ever again. They freely talked about how they are changing in ways that will affect their lives forever.

And then they shared that in the middle of this “marinating process,” there are also, “Jesus pop-tart moments.” When Jesus pops up out of the toaster of your life and just shows his face, and there is nothing slow about it. Bam, Jesus is with you. Surprise! And it’s sweet and warm and reassuring, like a pop-tart!

These are images for Advent…. God is the potter; we are the clay. We are being marinated in God’s juices, slowly and surely. And we are all invited to have “Jesus pop-tart moments.” The sweet presence of Jesus is in our midst.

We just need to stay awake to see all the ways we are being shaped by God. We are all the work of God’s hand.

One of the ways that I am being shaped by God is by being your Rector. It is changing me- by presiding, by preaching, by praying with you, within this community we affectionately call All Saints’, I am becoming someone new.

In this newness, I am realizing that I am a part of a church family that is a blessing. We are a blessing to each other, to this community and to the world.

It comes in simple ways. Jesus always talks about the small and the simple… the tiny mustard seed of faith that blooms, the scraps of fish and crumbs of bread that feed a multitude, the cup of water given at the side of a well that becomes the cup of living water, the yeast that rises to be bread for the world, the light at the top of the hill that shines in the darkness, or simple salt that seasons and saves.

Together, (we could never do this alone), we are blessings. We are blessings as we gather up Christmas presents for the children at Centro Victoria, as we prepare weekly meals for those who are hungry, as we provide snacks for children throughout the ConVal District, as we knit shawls, visit the homebound, serve at the altar, sing in the choir, prepare coffee hour, usher, pray healing prayers or write a poem. We are blessings beyond this church family as well, in the grocery stores, or when we bend down and tie our grandchild’s shoe or as we serve on nonprofit boards. We are all being shaped by these acts that bless.

At the heart of a blessing, always, is a kindness that dwells deep down- where all touched- feel understood and seen.

Our poet/theologian John O’Donohue says it well:

“Kindness has gracious eyes; it is not small-minded or competitive; it wants nothing back for itself. Kindness strikes a resonance with the depths of your own heart; it also suggests that your vulnerability, though somehow exposed, is not taken advantage of; rather, it has become an occasion for dignity and empathy. Kindness casts a different light, an evening light that has depth of color and patience to illuminate what is complex and rich in difference” (*To Bless the Space Between Us*, pg. 186).

It’s all so simple. We are a blessing which has nothing to do with us, but rather everything to do with God. God loves us first, shaping us, forming us, and we are given the opportunity to shine forth in that love. What a blessing to be a blessing.

We are the clay, being formed by God, the potter. And no matter what, no matter how dim or bleak comes the darkness, our hope in who we are as clay is based in our faith that at the deepest level of living, intimate kindness holds sway. We are blessed and in return we become blessings.

Blessings are swirling all around us. Keep awake! AMEN.