

Open Prairie United Church of Christ  
September 9, 2007  
Rev. Curran Reichert

Potter's House

**Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18**

O God, you have searched me and  
known me.

You know when I sit down and  
when I rise up; you discern my  
thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my  
lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O God, you know it completely.

You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for  
me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

For it was you who formed my  
inward parts; you knit me together in my  
mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and  
wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works; that I  
know very well.

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
I try to count them—they are more  
than the sand; I come to the end -I am still with you.

Fearfully and wonderfully made we are. The psalm speaks of an embodied knowledge that exists between God and each of us. We were known to each other right from the start. It is a comforting image.

When I trained to be an actor, I practiced a technique called sense memory exposition. I studied with a crazy polish man named Jerzy Grotowski, he was very famous and equally eccentric. I have since come to value his teachings more and more though they at first seemed to me a quiet mad. He taught that no matter what the feeling or emotion with which an actor was being challenged- the actor could always reach inside of one's own body and recover a sense memory that evoked a similar feeling to that which the character being portrayed is feeling. So, if for example an actor were playing a role in which someone dies...resource grief, pain, loss. Falling in love...resource giddy, goofy, and peaceful. Angry...well, no actor has to go looking very hard to find anger in his or her own body and so it goes. I trained for years to catalogue feelings and store them up in my body-to be able to access them at a moments notice.

This skill created in me a great tool for empathizing with others. For the most part, things people are feeling when they come and talk with me as a pastor; despair, anxiety, fear, sadness, even hopelessness, I am able to access a similar body memory located just below my own surface. It makes it easier to listen to someone when you can really empathize with what he or she is going through. That is the upside of the gift.

The downside is that I remember very keenly my own pain; it is never very far from reach. I don't mean that I hold a grudge or that I am always bordering on the verge of instability.

I simply remember events that caused me to have strong emotions, as if they had just happened. It is like having a library of feelings, each one with a call number and when I bid them they come. Only sometimes they come even un-bidden, such was the case this week.

I noticed early in the week that I was having trouble sleeping. I thought it might be because Katie and I were listening to the last of the Harry Potter books on CD right before turning in. Things get pretty gruesome there at the end and that could very likely have an effect on anyone's ability to sleep. I was content thinking that was what it was, until on my way into work on Tuesday- I saw a sign for the Homestead Festival and I stopped cold in my tracks. I felt a little lightheaded, there arose a deep ache in the pit of my stomach, and a little light bulb went off in my head.

Four years ago this day marked the second candidating service at Hampshire Colony. It was the day for all intent and purpose that the church was rent in two. The body of Christ suffered a tremendous blow that day and while I have long since forgiven those responsible for the hurt, the memory of what happened especially during the discussion after the vote was cast, is something my body will always recall bidden or not.

#### **Jeremiah 18:1-4**

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words.' So I went down to the potter's house, and there she was working at her wheel. The vessel she was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and she reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to her.

Later in the evening on Tuesday I was taking a walk, watching the pink sky turn to dusk and I got to thinking about this potter image in scripture and what it means to be clay in the capital "P," Potter's hands. When one is working with clay there are so many stages for things to go wrong. For example, if you do not wedge the clay correctly, air bubbles will form that can cause a piece to explode in the kiln. If you do not throw the ball of clay on the center of the wheel as it is spinning, the piece will be lopsided. If you do not add enough water while you are working the clay in your hands, it will become cracked and broken as it dries. And that is all before the first firing, then there is the glaze to apply and a second firing with pitfalls of it's own.

No wonder pottery is such a good metaphor for humanity. God sets out with this perfect relationship with us... known from our birth we are, it is as if from the earth we are created, full of potential and hope. And as we grow, shift and change, there are so many ways in which we can become bubbled, cracked and broken. But my friends herein lies the Good News. God does not give up on crackpots! God does not give up- ever. From the moment we are conceived, to the moment we draw our last breath, through to whatever exists for us with God beyond this earthen vessel, God never gives up. "Bambalela!" The word means never give up.

So, even though, four years ago, the church known as Hampshire Colony cracked and quiet literally split in two allowing all the beautiful contents to spill out every which way. God gathered up the pieces and fashioned us into something beautiful. But because the damage sustained by that particular explosion was too great to forge the pieces back into one, God created new vessels.

At first quiet small, but year after year a little bigger, a little stronger, a little bolder. Four years of guidance God has offered our fledgling church community- a steady hand shaping, encouraging, reshaping, again and again. And over the years it will grow stronger still- this vessel for God's love, until it spills up and over into a new incarnation birthing other possibilities, other vessels that will start small and grow beyond their wildest imaginings.

And so just as my body and many of your bodies may remember that which four years ago cracked, split and splintered like it was just yesterday. The good news is that four years from now, our bodies will also hold a memory of this moment and the moments of celebration that are to commence next weekend on our anniversary of becoming a new church. For indeed just as we can recall pain- we can also recall the immense joy our bodies felt and feel now at the prospect of God doing a new thing in us.

Fearfully and wonderfully made we are indeed and so we praise the living God, for potter's hands that transform us into wholeness over and over again.

Amen