

B Advent 1 Isaiah 64:1-9

God Imagines Wonderful Things for Us written by Karen Whitmer and preached by Pr. Mode

Thank you kids for putting together this video to remind us that **God has wonderful plans for us** ... and that we need to listen to Him and open our hearts to him.

And thank you to Jim Ely, who is an amazing potter, and who helped our youth make their video. Those pictures in the video were all actual pieces he created. Thank you, Jim!

So, God is the potter and we are his clay. That's today's message, but I do want to put this message in its historical context.

The Old Testament lesson we just read begins in chapter 64. But the background of this story starts earlier in the book of Isaiah when the Hebrew people were dragged into exile in Babylon by their enemies (around 586 BC).

It was a time of complete misery and despair for them. They were far away from their homeland and all that they had known. Their homes were destroyed and the temple, their place of worship was left in ruins

But, in about 540 BC, Isaiah had begun to prophesy that God would restore them to their homeland, Israel, and that he would do it through King Cyrus of Persia.

Well, the Lord followed through.

The people did return to Israel. But once they got there, things did not go well.

They did not get to work right away on rebuilding their temple, as God had told them to do.

They became self-absorbed, lazy, angry people.

There was violence, corruption and famine.

Their society was crumbling into chaos.

And people started to believe that God had abandoned them.

They whined and they sinned ... and things went from bad to worse.

Well, that's where we catch up with our lesson for today.

The people had lost their way and deserted their faith.

But Isaiah knew that God was heartbroken but he was still with them.

God was angry with his people ... but God's love for them was never ending.

And so, Isaiah pleaded with God on behalf of the people.

He asked God for help.

He asked God to forgive them & to put them on the right path.

And then there is today's unforgettable lesson. Isaiah says, *"Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand."*

As we were reminded with our kids' video, a potter takes a lump of clay and throws it onto a potter's wheel. And as it spins, he begins to form and mold the clay into something — a vase, a bowl, a pitcher. It is all up to the potter what the clay will become. As he works the clay, it goes from being a lump of the earth into something the potter has imagined, a masterpiece.

God has imagined us all as something beautiful. And if we allow God to work with us and through us, we become part of what God is doing in the world.

But the people of Isaiah's time had disregarded God. And it looked as if they would never again be shaped and formed according to God's plan.

Now, what does all this have to do with us? Why is the plight of the Hebrew people more than 2,500 years ago of interest to us?

Well, we are not unlike Isaiah's people.

When we get roughed up by life's circumstances, we may feel like the potter's clay. Heavy, dense and formless.

But when we allow the potter to use his touch, he can help make us into more than we can ever imagine we could become.

On the other hand, if we don't turn to God, we become self-absorbed, disobedient and lazy. And when we fall into whining and sin — then things do not go well. And in no time at all, our faith dwindles and our relationship with God suffers.

This message is a good one for us to hear today.

It is the First Sunday of Advent. In the Church year, today is the beginning of our preparation for the coming of Christ.

We are preparing, obviously, for Christmas, when Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world and was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. We also prepare for the coming of Christ at the end of time. It is that second coming that we hear Jesus speaking about in today's Gospel lesson, and about which we have been reading for several weeks now.

And finally, at Advent, we prepare for the coming of Christ into our hearts and into our congregations.

That coming occurs again and again.

For it is in that submission to Christ that we preserve and deepen the relationship that God cherishes.

When we open ourselves to the presence of Christ in us God the Potter works the clay into something wonderful that only God can imagine.

The vessels he makes of us will carry His grace into the world.

Isaiah promises the Hebrew people, whom God loved 2500 years ago, and for all of us, whom God loves today ...

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

This is the good news of the gospel.