

September 4, 2022

**The 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

The Rev. Laurel Coote

**St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church**

There is an old revival hymn written in the late 1920's by Daniel Iverson, called Spirit of the Living God, and it goes like this:

*Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.*

*Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.*

*Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.*

*Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.*

Not only a hymn, but a prayer. Words we sing, and words that we, too, may pray. Come, Holy Spirit, Come, it says: be known to me, surround me, fall afresh on me. And then, be at work in my life: Melt me, mold me, fill me and use me. Do not leave me as you found me, but embrace and transform me: so that by God's hands, my life might be reshaped and remolded; so that by God's grace, I might be filled with strength and wisdom for the journey; all so that I might love and serve God well, as I strive to love and serve others.

The sentiments of this hymn are echoed in our reading from Jeremiah, although in it, it is God who is calling out to Israel, seeking to transform them, rather than the people calling out to God for their own transformation. Jeremiah has proclaimed God's divine power: the power to break down and destroy, and the power to raise up and build. Such power can confront or shock us. We may find that we are more comfortable with God's power to love and save than we are with God's power to tear things apart. Yet, it is this same power that emanates from Jesus and the Spirit — divine power that can move us from being people who stray from God and God's purposes into being faithful people who desire to draw near to God, and whose hearts are open to being changed and transformed, even when it feels scary, or risky.

Our deepest longing might be for God's hands to take who we are in this present moment and lovingly, like a potter with their clay, re-make us so that our lives and purposes might truly be of service to God, and so that we might embrace our discipleship fully, not with fear or trepidation, not with resistance or resentment, but with a willingness of heart that is anchored in our faith in God.

But what is it to be remade and reshaped by God? And Is it something that we welcome, or something that we resist?

My friend, Sam, was ordained a few years ago, and was eager to begin working in ministry after a long and successful career as an educator. Hired in as an associate priest in a mid-sized parish, he jumped right in with enthusiasm. Although he had vast experience in teaching and formation, in addition to preaching and participating in liturgy, Sam was asked to serve as the associate for pastoral care which included leading two listening groups, facilitating a grief group, visiting with parishioners, hospital visits and home Eucharist. Within a few months, Sam found himself in a funk, certain that it just wasn't working out. Although he found great joy and meaning in his pastoral role, Sam mourned deeply his identity as a teacher. For so many years teaching was the way he made connections with

others, and he always felt it was something he did well. His spiritual director encouraged him to take time both to mourn his loss, and to reflect on how God was working through him as well as acknowledge the ways in which he contributes to others. It was through a cycle of letting go and taking on that Sam came to embrace his new role fully, and to embrace how God had reshaped his vocation. And, it was not long after that, that he was asked to share his gifts in teaching with the congregation.

We are creatures of habit and if things seem to be working well, we are content to leave well enough alone. Yet God breaks in, and things shift. It is in these moments that we may find ourselves straddling the line between our will and God's will. We may flounder, uncertain of what to do. But God's hands are always right there, ready to mold and shape, and reshape us for God's use — even when we are reluctant. God places others in our lives who also shape and reshape who we are, helping us to become who God desires us to be. And we, too, are used by God to help and guide others along their journey of faith — to see how God might be reshaping them.

Traumatic situations, new vocations, relationship challenges and more play a part in who we are, and who we become. Sometimes things like death or illness can force us into a new realm of living we didn't choose, leaving us feeling untethered and with a lot of questions. How do we embrace becoming who we never wanted or expected to be? What are we to do when the pathway forward is unclear, when the destination is uncertain? Sometimes the cost of change feels too great, and we may want to turn away, back to the comfort of what had been.

What would Jesus say to us in a moment such as this? First, he would remind us that we are not alone, that God is with and in us. And then, perhaps in a tone of voice like today's gospel, that is not so easy to hear, he would tell us that discipleship is costly, and that it does and will demand much of us — and he would reassure us that the sacrifice of following him is totally worth it. It is the thing, and he wants us to be all in. While we may not be called into the life-giving sacrificial realm of discipleship like Paul or Peter, to be a disciple of Jesus requires radical, sacrificial love and a willingness of heart to do God's will. This is the love and choice Jesus modeled. Jesus would tell us that we must be willing to take a stand for God, for justice, for love, for the faith because without God, we may find ourselves like Jeremiah's Israelites — convinced it was too late for God's redemption, too late to turn back. But it's never too late. God is always at the ready to reshape and restore us, waiting with open arms and hands, to guide us along the journey.

What might we discover if we chose to embrace change in our lives? Who might we become by being willing to not only call upon the power of the Holy Spirit to reshape and remold us, like the clay in the potter's hand, but to welcome it? What new graces might await us, and how might our lives as disciples of Jesus be enriched?

Along the journey, there will be joys and sorrows; wins and losses, times of stability and times of great disruption. God will stretch us, often further than we wish to go. And we will make it through — because as disciples of Jesus, we can trust that we are never alone. As

God's beloved people, we can trust in God's divine power that gives us life. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may offer the words of this prayer, in faith and courage, praying for our willingness to be all in.

*Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.*

*Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.*

*Melt me, Mold me, Fill me, Use me.*

*Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.*