

# *Order of Worship*

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, July 12, 2020

WELCOME

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come, let us worship the Lord God, the Creator of the universe.

**All: Let us worship God with our whole heart, our whole mind,  
and our whole being.**

One: Come, all who are weak, all who are burdened, all who are  
afflicted, and all who are searching.

**All: Come, let us all praise the Lord!**

HYMN

“How Great Thou Art”

HOW GREAT THOU ART

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 119: 105-112

CHILDREN’S TIME

PASTORAL AND LORD’S PRAYER

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy  
kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give  
us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we  
forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into  
temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

SCRIPTURE

Philemon 1-21

HYMN

“This Is a Day of New Beginnings”

BEGINNINGS

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 18: 1-11

MESSAGE

“Same Clay, New Day”

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN

“Have Thine Own Way, Lord”

ADELAIDE

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

## “Same Clay, New Day” - July 12, 2020

Has your “Plan A” ever not gone according to plan? You thought you had the right materials, the right training, and the right motives to make something work well. But somewhere in the process there is a glitch. Perhaps the people you were counting on weren’t as trustworthy as you thought. Maybe the materials never materialized when you needed them. It could be that your location or timing was off. The construction crews tore up the roads in front of your new shop, COVID-19 closed your doors, or the clouds rained on your lemonade stand. When your hopes and plans fall flat, it is easy to walk away and decide the work and pain and mess aren’t worth it.

The good news is that God doesn’t walk away from messes, disappointments, or any of our failures. The reading from Psalm 119 reminds us that God’s *“word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances. I am severely afflicted; give me life, O Lord”*. In other words, “I’m hurting, but I’m committed, and I’m counting on God to light the path I need to be walking on.”

The second reading was part of a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to Philemon regarding a slave named Onesimus. Paul was urging Philemon to no longer use or treat Onesimus as a slave, but instead to love him like a brother. Onesimus is not a project or means to an end – he is God’s creation, created as equal with Paul and Philemon and the rest of humanity. In other words, God doesn’t make second-class or “less-than” people! God creates each of us as a masterpiece, and we are called to treat one another that way.

However, sometimes we have each chosen to do or be less than who God created us to be. We resist God’s hand guiding and shaping us. We harden our hearts and wall off God and others from telling us the truth that could set us free. We choose the path of least resistance rather than one that may be more challenging and need God’s light guiding us each step of the way. And when we do, Jeremiah 18:4 becomes real: *The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the*

*potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.*

The good news is that God, the master potter, can take our lives that have started to bend and bow the wrong way, and rework us into something that God says is good. The news that goes along with this is what our stubborn hearts often don't want to hear or accept – we have to be willing to be changed. We have to submit to God's will, and not live for our own selfish inclinations. We must humble ourselves. As God says in Jeremiah 18:7-10: *“At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it.”*

God is always good, and always intends ultimate good for us. And when I say “us”, the Bible is clear that this is just as much on a group level as it is an individual basis. Not only do we need to personally keep our hearts and minds soft and open to God's will, we're vividly reminded that we need to live as a “community of humility”, a “flexible fellowship”, and a “church willing to change”.

Our congregation's resident potter, Steve Loftus, has worked with many of the youth in our church and community to help create pottery bowls that are beautifully designed and sold to raise funds to feed the hungry. He explained to me that clay has air bubbles in it that must be broken through a process called “wedging”. If clay had feelings, it might feel beaten and overwhelmed at all the pushing, pulling, and pounding it goes through to get those air bubbles out. We tend to think, “what's wrong with a little air?” “How can our little ‘sin’ that no one can see hurt anyone else?”

The problem comes when the clay needs to be fired. Even if the outside looks flawless, if there are air bubbles on the inside of the clay, it will explode in the kiln. When the heat is on in our lives, both individually and collectively, we can thank God for loving us enough

to work diligently to shape us into something good that lasts, even if it feels painful in the process.

We are each and all together like that clay, whether outwardly resistant to shaping, or inwardly holding secret airs and attitudes that will ultimately cause an explosion when the heat is on. Even though God knows us and our weaknesses better than we know ourselves, God never gives up on us. However, if we want another chance to be who God wants us to be, then we must be willing to let God have full access to our hearts, minds, calendars, finances, and priorities in life. Are you willing to say “yes” to the life-long process to stay flexible, open, and trusting to God? Are we together willing to unite our hearts with humility and pray for renewal? At first it is a challenge to ask Christ to convict and transform us of our “air bubble” attitudes and actions of sin. But when we do, God takes the clay of our lives - and the clay of our church and community and even country - and gives us the promise of a new day and future with healing, purpose, and hope.