

11.29.20 A1 Molder of the Clay

- There are a few people in our congregation who are old enough to have been children during the Great Depression of the 1930s when millions of people were out of work, and many people were pushed into hard times
 - People who remember that great depression then grew up to be careful savers and cautious spenders
- A few more people in our congregation remember the Second World War, and how the country pulled together, and made sacrifices at home to support the war effort against the Nazis and the Imperial Japanese
 - Many young people from this era grew up as part of that Great Generation – a grateful generation marked by loyalty and teamwork
- Then came the Baby Boomers who were born after the war, who often became free spirits, but who also remembered cold war nuclear drills where they sheltered under school desks, or parents keeping canned goods in the basement which would become a homemade bomb shelter
- Viet Nam erupted and many more people here remember or served in that undeclared war, and the scars of that war and the protests against the war, as well as the race riots of the 60s have never been resolved
 - Many young people from that time have often grown up conflicted about war, peace, and race, but they also vividly remember the assassinations of President Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, and Martin Luther King
- Watergate came next, and young people shaped by the 70s often grew up with a deep distrust of government and politicians
- Then there was 9-11 and the destruction of the World Trade center as well as part of the Pentagon, both with great loss of life
 - Young people since then have grown up in the shadow of terrorism, whether the terrorism is from foreigners, or the terrorism is from locally born students and young adults committing mass shootings in schools like Columbine, Colorado, and churches like Emanuel AME in Charleston, South Carolina

- And now here we are in the middle of a pandemic, and it is too soon to know how this pandemic will shape the outlook of today's young people ten, twenty or forty years from now
- Events of the world – especially the most difficult events of the world when we are young – events of the world scar us, the tragic events shape us, and the calamities of this world mold or leave marks on our lives that influence how we look at this world, and even how we respond to our neighbors
- But all of the notable events that I have named so far have been tragic or terrible, but today *I would like us to hear that there are other forces that shape our lives* – these are *the great events and the wonderful experiences that leave a positive mark on us* – and no event is greater or more wonderful than the *amazing love that God has already given to us in Jesus Christ*
- When several of us were at the 2018 Youth Gathering in Houston, over 30,000 young people and adult leaders gathered in Jesus' name
 - This huge event had all kinds of music – Christian rock, Christian country western, Christian hip hop, there were well-known traditional church hymns, and there was music that I have no idea what to call it
 - But do you know what song almost blew the roof off the arena?... “Jesus Loves Me”
 - Imagine over 30,000 people, most of them in their teens, singing their lungs out saying “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so, little ones to him belong, they are weak but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so!”
 - “Jesus Loves Me” is a children's song that many of us heard and learned when we were VERY young
 - And clearly, most of the teens and adults in Houston that day reached back into their childhood and remembered that ever since the time that they were young, Jesus loved them
 - And that love of Jesus for us shapes our lives even from the time we slept in cribs, and it can then be remembered and poured out in loud teenage voices rocking the house down in Houston

- There are so many things that God can use to shape us... Children's songs... the assurance of water poured and the promise of forgiveness and life spoken in Holy Baptism... hymns and liturgy... prayer... sermons... Sunday School and Bible School... the love of the faith community when we gather together... the forgiveness declared in the cross of Christ and the hope promised in Christ's resurrection... the Body and Blood of Christ given for each one of us so that we can literally taste the promise of God that is given to us together with the bread and wine...
- All of these both separately and together tell us again and again and again that Jesus loves us, and that love of God leaves a mark... *that love of God plants the faith that shapes our lives*
- And that Jesus loves us despite our sin, that despite our unworthiness, and despite our wandering away like prodigal sons and daughters only to be welcomed back again by the wide-open arms of an amazingly gracious and loving parent – that is the Good News that plants faith and shapes our lives
- Now of course, it is never too late, and we are never too old to hear that message of God's gift of love, that is the Good News of Jesus Christ that shapes and sustains us
- And now, even in the midst of a pandemic when a quarter million people just in our country have died, and many more have been made terribly sick – even in the midst of a pandemic that will doubtlessly leave a scar that will shape on our lives in the years, each of us needs to hear that God's love for us is far greater than the pandemic, and it is that love for us that can leave a mark that is far greater than our scars
- In our reading from Isaiah for today we heard, "Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,
and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people. [64:8-9]"
- Indeed, God is the potter, and we are the clay, and Jesus' love will leave a bigger and deeper mark than the pandemic's scar
- God's Good News always welcomes us when we have been wayward daughters and sons, and God's love shown most clearly

in Christ's death and resurrection will shape our lives like a potter taking a lump of clay, and turning it into a son or daughter who Jesus loves, this we know