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Isaiah 64:8-9

Tie That Binds: "Formed"

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Some of us start reading or listening to a story, only then to abandon it before we have finished the book. There are a lot of books that are great and unread. You know, those books that everyone says are great: "it's a classic," "one of the best books of all-time," "a masterpiece." But almost no one reads them.

Jordan Ellenberg, a University of Wisconsin professor, used Amazon's Kindle to do an interesting experiment. In the Kindle version of a book, you can highlight meaningful passages. It also shows the five passages most highlighted by other readers. Ellenberg realized you could learn quite a bit about how much of the book people read by where the highlighted passages are. If they all came early in the book, you'd know that it was pretty likely most people never got to the second half.

The winner (loser?) for the "prize" of the most unread recent best-seller was Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. The book got a lot of political coverage, but in the end it's a 700-page "polemical treatise on economic inequality." All five of the most highlighted passages occur before page 27! Doesn't sound like many people made it very deep into that book.

Some of us start in Genesis, read about the Garden of Eden and the fall, and then conclude – such a downer, and thus never read on. Some persevere only to get nearly put to sleep or nearly drown in all the rules and rituals in the fourth and fifth books named Deuteronomy and Numbers. Some of us go on to begin the prophets, but soon conclude that those books are

nothing but the rantings and ravings of some pretty angry folks. And if we do get to the New Testament, we become stuck in the mire that is the parables, and I could say more about not getting the whole story, but for now, you have probably gotten the point I am trying to make.

Some of us have a skewed view of God, or at best a limited and limiting view of God. Yet, Isaiah gives us in the passage read this morning, a new understanding of God, which can serve as additional God information or a whole perspective on who God is and what God does as a Potter.

Some of us have a skewed view of ourselves and other people, or at best a limited and limiting view of ourselves, and others, so Isaiah may once again help us in our relationships, this time with ourselves and others, if we would but see ourselves as clay.

First, let's look at **God the Potter**. The work of a potter goes something like this:

- Imagine beautiful things. We are God's handiwork. – beautiful and precious in God's sight. I know you've heard this before, but just because you don't believe it doesn't mean it is not true. Believe it, your closeness with God, and your relationship with others depends on it. We are commanded to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. So, what then is the consequence when we don't love ourselves? God has imagined beautiful things – us, you and me!
- The second work of a potter is to make a happy mess. When I first graduated from college, I worked in rural Appalachia, southeast Kentucky to be exact, as a teacher, coach, and recreation director. In our recreation program we had pottery making. Trick was, first I had to learn

pottery. I was told by a potter, that I should throw 100 pots before I kept my first one. Some of us, only see ourselves and others as a mess. Yet, the truth is, we are God's happy mess. Too many of us have an angry, mean-spirited, out to get you, "I'm gonna fry you" you know, the turn or burn kind of God. Yet, any potter knows, that it is hard to make a worthwhile final product without gentleness, even when applying pressure, and being ever patient throughout the entire process. This is our God – the Potter! The one who does not throw away the 99 pots and keeps only one. Rather, God works on us and with us, till we become beautiful vessels of God's love and goodness. Yes, at times we are a bit of a mess, but God's happy mess, in whom God delights!

- Potters must learn to sell their work to consumers. Are you buying it, and you going to take this great opportunity to own what is beautiful and unique – namely you: being formed and transformed by God?

Now, let's talk about **the clay**.

There are over thirty different types of clay, which are divided into three main classes: earthenware, mid-fire stoneware, and high-fire stoneware. These three classes are sometimes described as earthenware, stoneware and porcelain, respectively, after the type of pottery these clays make.

These categories of clay are based on how long and at what temperature the clay must be fired in order to reach maturation, or its optimal hardness.

We are the clay. Some of us are like porcelain made of fine-grained white clay and thus have had the heat turned up high in our lives, so we could get that way. Others of us are more like stoneware, and we often come in buff, brown or gray and we need a medium fire to get us to the place of exceptional

durability. Then, there are those of us who at this time are earthenware, for we have received low firing to date because we have been only in a simple pit fire, and thus, we are more porous, and less durable due to that!

We are the clay. We don't all come from the same geography, we are not made of the same "stuff", we have all been through some kind of fire, yet some of us have been under fire longer and hotter than others. And thus we must remember, each of us as God's vessels, formed by the kindest and gentlest of hands who is turning us into something quite unique, each beautiful and useful in his or her own right – because we all have been made and formed by the same Potter. Are we celebrating our common connections as God's children? We should, because blessed be the tie that binds!