

Preached by Rev. JF Hudson at Pilgrim UCC: 9/8/07
Text: Luke, Jeremiah

“Shaped in Community”

From the text: [And God said} “Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hands, O house of Israel.”

“I can do it myself!” I’m blessed right now to have a little two-year old toddler in my life, Johana, my Goddaughter, she with wisps of fine blonde hair, and sharp blue eyes, a sweet smile and, of course, a blossoming streak of fierce independence. Lately it’s been getting harder and harder to get her to hold on to my hand when we cross the street. She’s not as cooperative when I ask her to put down the cat and stop squeezing him so hard. She not be interested in the food on the plate which might end up on the floor and and when it is time to leave the playground, if she doesn’t want to depart: angry tears will flow. I’m just waiting for her to utter those first words of human independence, the ones we all defiantly said to our caregivers, when we were twenty-four months old or so. “I can do it myself! I can do it myself!”

Independence, independence, the very human declaration that we can take care of ourselves, that we can run our own lives, that we can make our own decisions, that we are the captains of our destinies, the rulers of our individual worlds. For a two year old such thoughts of independence are an incredible epiphany because “Developmental Psychology tells us that, at birth, infants actually believe that they and their mother's are one. And it is only between the ages of five and twelve months that children realize they are separate from their mother.”¹

So as humans much of life is marked by our first steps of independence: first day of school(lots of teary Moms this week in town!); first overnight at a friends; first date; first car; first job; first drink; first kiss; first home....step by step the human quest would seem to be one of moving away from that infantile notion interdependence on another, of saying in all of these benchmarks: “I can do it myself!” and yet, and yet....

and yet...of not be separate from ‘the other’. Our human independent babies are actually born thinking, thinking they are not separate from their Moms. o plate or put down the She, like all toddlers, like Julianna whom we met this morning, get to a point in their social development eighteen Or can we, really? It often takes a crisis, a trauma, a setback to teach us otherwise. Two years ago this fall I returned from a three-month sabbatical thinking I should be physically refreshed but instead fighting fatigue and odd symptoms

We need God. We need each other. We need the church to be a place where we and our loved ones are shaped by God, shaped like the potter shapes the clay on the spinning wheel.

yatsar: to form, fashion, framea) (Qal) to form, fashion, create

¹ From QUANTUMLIFECHANGES.COM/PERSONALITY.HTM

we are shaped by God in community--with and through one another--Christianity is not a solo act, a personal crusade, a mere self-centered journey undertaken for our own spiritual edification or enlightenment alone--

we are shaped by God to be in community, to be with and for one another

to declare ourselves on a spiritual path we ask God to shape and mold us: not just secular society, not mere human values or values of the workplace or politics or consumption-- we put ourselves into God's hand and say, "Shape me, mold me, make me, hold me"

That Godly creation happens most powerfully in community:
me--shaped by Becky Johnson--youth advisor when I was 16
Herrel Beck as a seminary student

the lie of modern spirituality, of so much new age religion is that it can happen at a table for one, in a personal spiritual temple

As Martin Luther King said, "We are all woven together into the seamless garment of destiny. I cannot be who I want to be until you are who you want to be and you cannot be who you want to be until I am who I want to be."

Single Mom, widow and the widower, couple struggling in marriage, teen shunned by her peers cuz she won't do drugs, businessman making hundreds of thousands of dollars but slowly dying spiritually inside, unemployed professional sitting forlornly at home,

do we know that we need each other? do we know that God forms us into a we and not just a me?

story; get down off of the roof? bucket story
love heights--northern Ireland

got to get down off of the roof John and back onto firm ground with others

faith is the tether that grounds us

faith is personal but never private--Jim Wallis

1) Can we own that we do need each other—independence—in particular when it comes to faith and community, life, meaning, purpose—its myth—ubuntu

2) We become fully human, we grow in faith through others—God shapes us in our relationships—to speak of God outside of the context of human relationships is a lie--Can we see that we are shaped largely by God through relationship—we become Christian not on some hoop-de-do vision quest, out in the desert alone, but in her, with each other,

3) Can we see we need everyone and I mean everyone—not just the straight people, not just the physically able, not just those who are married those with advanced degrees, those but everyone—King quote