

"You don't always get a second chance, but sometimes, you do." It is the lead in words for the Sunday Morning advertisement for the rebroadcast of a Prairie Home Companion. Our Jeremiah text for today is clear that God is in the business of giving second chances.

Not everything we do as individuals pleases God.

I was at the high school football game at Legion Field last Monday –Labor Day. There were two games to raise money for the participating schools athletic programs. In the parking lot after the game, some teenagers started arguing – before you know it, one pulls out a gun and shoots other teenagers. Not everything we do as individuals pleases God.

His parent – his father- constantly berated him because he spent a lot of his time with his music, his guitar. The words from his father were, "He should put that thing down and get a real job. He should do something worth while. He will never amount to anything with that guitar. He is wasting his life." The father was doing his best to kill a dream. Not everything we do as individuals pleases God.

Miss Sarah had been to the bank and cashed her social security check. A woman, posing as a worker with Human Resources came up and Miss Sarah was entering her home. Once inside the house, she pretended to need information to fill out a form. Miss Sarah, who is 90 something, went in the other room to get her social security number. While she was in the other room, the lady took all the money of her social security check from Miss Sarah's purse. She was long gone when Miss Sarah got back. Not everything we do as individuals is pleasing to God.

Not everything we do as a community pleases God.

The City Council passed a one cent tax increase to fix our school buildings and build a couple of new schools. The tax was one cent on everything we bought. The tax seems fair enough on the surface. Everyone pays the same. But there is a big difference on a one cent tax if your income is 14 thousand or 80 thousand. Not everything we do as a community pleases God.

We want all of our parents to be good parents – to spend time with their children – to teach them right from wrong – to teach them we live in community together. But when the minimum wage is so low that the parent (s) has to work two jobs to afford food, clothes and housing – forget healthcare and school books – there is no time left for the family. Parenting – teaching behavior, right from wrong, how to live in community becomes the job of the school system. Not everything we do as a community pleases God.

The school system is not educationally sound and much of the time is spent on discipline. There is violence in the schools and the community. So we flee to the safe suburbs, (black and white alike) – most all of those who can afford to do so. Then we begin to speak of "their" violence, "their" bad schools – while we have pulled away funding and leadership. Not everything we do as a community pleases God.

Not everything we do as a nation is pleasing to God.

We are insistent on war – even under false pretense. There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and we knew it. Al Quida was not in Iraq until they showed up to fight our troops. A week ago, 543 people were killed in two separate bomb explosions in Iraq. But they do not count in the war total casualty list – they were civilians. A soldier is wounded in Iraq. He/she is transported to Germany, a medical facility. If that soldier dies in Germany they are not counted as a soldier killed in combat. The administration has decreed that they were not on the battlefield when they died, so they were not killed in combat. Not everything we do as a nation pleases God.

# PILGRIM C H U R C H

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

We look at the immigrants coming to America. For those who are poor, unskilled, we devise laws, policies to try to keep them out. Never mind that they work in our chicken farms, in our landscaping industry – they are illegal. The words are still on the Statue of Liberty given to us by France. A Jewish girl wrote the words that are carved into that statue. "Give me your tired, your poor. Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shores. Send these, the homeless, tempest tossed to me. I lift by lamp beside the golden door." Our present reaching out to immigrants does not match those words.

We as individuals, communities, and a nation need second chances. Jeremiah goes out to the valley of the potteries. It is not just a casual, shopping trip – he is not looking for a bird bath. He goes with prophetic intent. Jeremiah observes the way of the potter as he is making a piece of pottery. When the vessel turns out mishapened and spoiled, the potter remolds it into another form – as seems good to the potter.

Jeremiah wants us to understand that God does that with people and nations. If the clay is rebellious and does not respond to the intended design of the potter, it is broken up and reformed. If the clay is malleable, the potter can still fashion it into a useful vessel. But if the clay is hard and set, it cannot be remade.

The gospel – the Good News- in the text for today is that God, like the potter is patient. God does not just cast us aside. God takes us and reforms us.

No we do not always please God with our actions – as individuals, as community, as a nation.

But Jeremiah is reminding us that God does not leave us in our alienated state from God. God's spirit seeks to bridge whatever gap exists. God seeks to renew us for creative, loving, open hearted, open handed service. The Good news is that God did not merely make us and go away and leave us to our own devices. God is among us God does not cast us aside. As the potter remakes a piece of clay, so God works to remake us.

A part of our problem with living by ourselves in community is that we have tried to invert the order of creation. In our disobedience we are saying "God did not make me. I am the creator."

I am aware of the theological questions that come with this passage in Jeremiah. Does God know everything? Is God all powerful? If you ask me to choose between an omnipotent God or the goodness of God, I'll always choose God's goodness. God does give second chances. My prayer for us today would come from the words of an old gospel hymn.

"Have Thine own way Lord, have thine own way,  
Thou art the potter, I am the clay.  
Mould me and make me after thy will  
While I am waiting, yielded and still."