

Lenten Devotional March 22, 2021

Scripture

Romans 9:19-33

19 You will say to me then, "Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" 20 But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use? 22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction; 23 and what if he has done so in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— 24 including us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? 25 As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.' 26 And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they shall be called children of the living God." 27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved; 28 for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth quickly and decisively." 29 And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left survivors to us, we would have fared like Sodom and been made like Gomorrah." 30 What then are we to say? Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; 31 but Israel, who did strive for the righteousness that is based on the law, did not succeed in fulfilling that law. 32 Why not? Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 as it is written, "See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

Devotional

The Rev. Richard Kinney '07

In the epistle reading for today the Apostle Paul ushers us into a spiritual mystery. Why has God ordained a world of vast disparity and unfairness? The Apostle uses the image of God-the-Potter/We-the-Clay and suggests that God makes pottery of different quality. Some people have mental or physical disabilities or early onset of disease. Some children are born into broken families or crippling poverty, while others are born into wealth and privilege, seemingly destined for success. Some people groups are outside the saving work of Christ while others have generational faith. Respectively, Paul calls these people "objects of wrath made for destruction" and "objects of mercy, prepared for glory." That seems so unfair.

The 2014 movie *The Drop Box* documents the story of a church in South Korea with an amazing ministry to disabled, abandoned children. The ministry began when the pastor of the church and his wife gave birth to a child with severe deformities and brain damage. At birth, the child had growing off his cheek a lump the size of a second head. He would never be able to walk, talk, feed, or bathe himself. That he required 14 years of surgeries and therapies before he could be released from the hospital forced the family to sell their home to pay for his medical bills. As you watch the movie, you can't help but think, "Put the poor thing out of his misery." If ever there was a poorly made piece of pottery, "an object of wrath made for destruction," this child would surely seem to be it. Yet God had a purpose for that child's life. Like the words Moses says to Pharaoh, quoted by Paul here in verse 17, "For this very *purpose* I raised you up, in order that I might demonstrate in you, my power, and in order that my name might be proclaimed far and wide in all the earth."

Through that deformed child, the pastor and his wife learned the value of every human life. They have treated their child with great dignity, and it led them and their church to a ministry of rescuing and

raising other disabled children. Abandoning babies (especially disabled ones) in dumpsters or back alleys is a huge problem in South Korea, so the church created a Drop Box—an incubated receptacle where desperate mothers can anonymously place their baby, who is then transported through the exterior wall and into the shelter of the church. Thus the disabled orphans are given a chance in life and raised in love. At the time *The Drop Box* was filmed, 500 babies had been saved in this way, and many of them have grown to be well-adjusted members of society. All this goodness came about because of one child whom God allowed to be born with such severe disadvantages.

The Bible never explains why there is disease, inequity, and unfairness in this world. It is a broken, fallen world. But God is calling those of us who have received God's mercy to show God's mercy to others. The weakness we see in others should soften our hearts with compassion and draw us to their aid, and the weakness we see in ourselves should humble our pride and draw us to receiving help from others. God wants the weak, fragile pottery of this world to teach compassion to society, and God wants the seeming objects of wrath to be honored through the ministry of objects of mercy. And in this way God not only brings a broken world back together but also, in the process, weaves a beautiful tapestry out of the glorious and inglorious parts of our humanity.

Prayer

Abba Father, Thou art the Potter, We are the clay. May we be content with our created limitations; strengthen us with Thy mercy where we are insufficient. And lead us also to others, especially the weaker vessels of Thy Creation, that the mercy we show them may bring glory to Thee. Mold us and fashion us all into the image of Jesus Thy Son. Amen.