

## **Making Do, Making New Sunday, 2/28/21**

Have you ever asked the question, “How burned is too burned?” If you like chocolate chip cookies, perhaps these aren’t too burned. Maybe you’d be willing to make do with these cookies, figuring burned cookies are better than no cookies at all. But would you give these cookies to a neighbor or a sweetheart as a gift if they were all this burned on the bottom? I wouldn’t intentionally, although I did recently share some biscotti with someone only to realize after the fact that I had gone too far with the second bake and burned them. Usually, we don’t simply make do when we’re trying to be a blessing to someone. We go all out and try to give them the very best that we have to offer.

Sometimes you can rescue a baking project gone awry by scraping off the bottom or cutting away the burned edges of a cake or a pan or brownies. But other times, there’s really nothing left to do other than toss it in the compost pile and start another batch. And that’s the dilemma we find God’s people facing in the vision given to Jeremiah by God, who won’t be satisfied with making do, at least not in the usual way we take that to mean.

This pot is in a sad state. Uneven walls, uneven pressure, or perhaps using too much water with the clay has caused the walls of this pot to collapse, and it’s going to be better to simply start the process over. It’s not easy to throw pots, and there’s a great deal of skill and vision that the potter brings to the right clay and tools. There are probably more ways to ruin a pot than to make a good one, but master potters can make amazing works, even when the materials and tools aren’t the very best.

In Jeremiah’s vision, God compares God’s people to the clay on a potter’s wheel. The collapsed walls of that particular pot aren’t caused by a lack of skill in the master potter, but by flawed clay, a people prone to wickedness rather than God’s way of love. The way of love isn’t an extra ornamentation on God’s handiwork. It’s an integral part of God’s design, without which God’s plan collapses. God’s inclination isn’t to make do with a damaged pile of clay, but to make new, getting all the fundamentals of love right before moving on to the ornamentations. It’s a harsh warning, as these prophetic messages in Scripture tend to be. Fortunately, there’s a whole lot more to the Holy Scriptures than the Prophets, and so we know that God plan isn’t to toss out all the damaged clay, but to work with us as we are to make something new.

In *Love Is the Way*<sup>1</sup>, Bishop Curry describes a holy kind of making do, a making do that uses the materials at hand to make a new creation out of the old. A making do that becomes a making new. His Grandmother Nellie had a way of creating a meal for her family that tasted ‘like love feels.’<sup>2</sup> Bishop Curry describes the way his Grandmother made dishes like Chitlins, which are cooked pig intestines. Why did Nellie cook pig intestines? Because they didn’t have much, and parts like the intestines were the leftovers from the pork processing plants that poor families like Nellie’s could afford.

Let’s think about that for moment. “Making do” might mean that we have to do with less, and so we might begrudgingly tighten our belts and manage to choke down the chitlins. But that’s not the way God does it, and that’s not the way Grandmother Nellie did it either. She followed the example of her ancestors, who “took a little and gave a lot. They took what was left over and made sure no one was left out. They took foods that were put down in cast out by others and lifted the hungry up. That’s a miracle. That’s taking what is old and making something new. That’s making do!”<sup>3</sup>

God has a unique way of making do and making new in our lives as well. Nowhere is that better illustrated than in the sacrament of Holy Baptism, when we symbolically die to our old way of life when we surrender to the waters of baptism and are born again as new people. That’s where the tradition of “christening” came from, when a person was given a new Christian name when they emerged from the baptismal waters. In baptism, God makes do with the broken person we’ve become and through the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit makes someone entirely new. But it’s not just our baptism that witnesses to God’s redemptive genius. As the Apostle Paul, writes, the death and resurrection of Jesus has ongoing power in every Christian’s life, filling each day with the potential for making do and making new. I’m reading from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, the second chapter, beginning with verse 1 in the New Living Translation.

**{Read Ephesians 2:1-10 NLT}**

Swapping metaphors a bit with Paul, he writes that we are all cracked pots, because

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<sup>1</sup> Bishop Michael Curry. *Love Is the Way*, pp. 50-70. Avery (2020).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

every one of us has a history of sin, of willful disobedience to God. Every one of us deserves to be smashed on the potter's wheel and remade. But the Good News of God's grace prevents that. When we turn to Jesus and accept the gift of salvation that he offers us each new day, we become God's masterpieces. Not because of our flaws, but because of Jesus Christ and the surpassing love of God. We don't remake ourselves by working harder, we allow God to remake us in Jesus as a pure gift. God makes do with what we've become, and makes us new in Christ, new to walk the way of love and new to share that love with others.

Bishop Curry lists three things that Grandmother Nellie used to make do and make new in her kitchen: Tradition, imagination, and God.<sup>4</sup> Tradition is like a cookbook. This is the cookbook that I grew up with. I learned to trust it because my mother used it and I had used many of the recipes over the years. I knew that the recipes had been tested over and over again by people before me. Since then, my most prized cookbook isn't this one, but the one my sister collated of all the favorite recipes that various members of my family have used to serve love at our many family gatherings.

Tradition can get a bad rap, because sometimes tradition is used to stifle progress. Tradition in the best sense doesn't mean refusing to make new, but rather, drawing from the deep, collective wisdom of our peers and the ancestors who have gone before us. Just as good cooking relies on the wisdom of tradition, so does walking the way of love. Even though the world is a constantly changing place, we still have much to learn from our elders in the faith.

Imagination is the ability to see something that could exist before it actually does, like seeing a mature oak tree where only an acorn or a sapling exists.<sup>5</sup> Grandmother Nellie had the power to reframe problems as opportunities, like seeing penicillin in a patch of mold.<sup>6</sup> It takes imagination to see what God wants to make of this broken world, and imagination to inspire us to join God in that work. Think of the many prophets, kings, heroes, and disciples of the Bible. Where would any of them be without a holy imagination?

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

The way of love requires imagination, especially in situations where love is most absent. Imagine living in a time and place where slavery was still openly practiced. It is, of course, still happening in this country in present evils like sex trafficking, but I'm talking about the world as it was long before the American Civil War. Institutional slavery was taken for granted as a necessary way of living. What kind of holy imagination must have been required to see a world where all people were created equal? There's still a long way to go until that dream is fully realized, but holy imagination has long fueled the movements of love to bring freedom to those in bondage.

The third critical ingredient in Grandmother Nellie's kitchen, and the way of love, is God. In truth, no amount of wishful or optimistic thinking can be relied on to effect real change in the way of love. It's our hope in God's present and future, seen through the eyes of faith, that make that possible. The famous 18<sup>th</sup> century preacher Jonathan Edwards understood the vital relationship between love and faith in God when he said, "Love is no ingredient in a merely speculative faith, but it is the life and soul of a practical faith."

Bishop Curry describes attending a graveside burial of his Aunt Callie, saying, "We couldn't see heaven, we couldn't see resurrection, but we could feel its possibility. God had been factored into the equation of our experience and something in reality changed. That's where and when hope happens – when reality is altered by a new possibility. It's what the Bible calls hoping against hope. And that hope begins the journey of faith, and interestingly enough, all genuine efforts to change for the good. That's what making do can do for you."<sup>7</sup>

The way of love isn't an easy way to live, because we're all cracked pots, imperfect vessels for the perfect love of God. But by the mercy and grace of God, we are being transformed by Spirit, informed by our tradition, set free by our holy imaginations, and fueled by our faith into new creations, made in love for the purpose of sharing love. May it be so for all of us, beginning today. Amen.

Please take some time now to reflect on how God can make do and make new in your life. If you like, you can share a comment or a prayer.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp 67-68.



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