

**Rev. Adrienne Meier**

**March 3, 2021, Midweek Service for the Second Week in Lent  
St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana**

### **Making a Mess of Things**

#### **Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16**

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous."*

*Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you."*

*God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."*

Growing up, my family hosted an annual reunion at the Deer Creek Conservation Club off a rural route in Carroll County. It was a concrete building with an algae covered pond. I remember the old, bang-y screened doors, and the smell of the food, the webbed, woven lawn chairs whose metal brace on the back of your thighs would put your legs to sleep. And I remember the playground: an aluminum slide — that we'd clean the chocolate frosting off the back of a piece of wax paper and then go down the slide on that to make it really slick — and there was also a set of monkey bars. I've never been a person with a lot of upper arm strength, so I mostly stuck to the slide. But one year, I was determined to accomplish the monkey bars. I didn't share this with anyone because I wasn't confident at all. So, that was how I ended up hanging onto the third monkey bar and crying for my dad. Hopefully, you've been there, too. Or you'll just look the other way, and spare me the embarrassment if you haven't. Anyway, I remember that the ground seemed so far away. In truth, I tried some monkey bars on a nice day last December and still didn't get very far and the ground still looks so very far away. But I'm a lot taller now. I remember my dad coming over and putting out his arms saying, Adrienne, let go. I'll catch you.

I'm not sure the monkey bars amount to a mistake, but I was certainly feeling the consequences of my actions, and yet, someone still caught me. We'll make a lot of mistakes in life - real mistakes. Mistakes with consequences that harm other people, people we care about. When we make a mess of our lives, we have a responsibility to

make things right, but we also have the opportunity to witness the beautiful ways God redeems us.

God had told Abraham and Sarah again and again what had been promised when God called them from their country and their kin to the land God showed them. God kept reminding them of his promise, but when things didn't materialize, they took things into their own hands. In a horrifying event, they use and abuse Sarah's servant in order to have an heir, and they'll even make it worse before it is all over. Like last week, I don't want to explain this away. Abraham and Sarah made a mistake. The Bible really doesn't record a satisfactory tale of them making things right, either. They made a real mess of things.

We like to pretend that we never make mistakes, because we've bought the lie that a mistake-free life is the only life of value. The truth is that we're really great at messing up, at sabotaging ourselves, at justifying our addictions, at denying our privilege. When we look at our lives, our relationships, the systems that we are entangled in because humans exist in systems - it shouldn't take us long to see that we've made a real mess of things. We've polluted our planet, exploited that vulnerable, we've consumed when we could have created, and we've invited all kinds of ingenious distractions that take us away from our kids and our partners and even our best work. We've really made a mess of things.

We have to make things right.

When we've really made a mess of things, we have to make things right. That is our responsibility. But we also have to understand two things. First, we have to remember that a mistake-free life isn't a more valuable one. And, second, that redemption is God's best work.

In Japan, there is a beautiful art form called *kintsugi* where broken pottery is repaired with gold, silver, or platinum. Rather than seeking to hide what has happened, *kintsugi* includes - celebrates - the break as part of the item's history. By filling the breaks with a valuable substance, the item is now of no lesser value than it was before. Your life is not valued by perfection, nor is it devalued by mistakes. Your value comes from one thing alone: being a child of God. This call enables us to act with integrity, to take risks, to welcome the mess, to work with God to right-side-up the world.

Because this is where God does God's best work. Leonard Cohen once said, "there 's a crack in everything , that's how the light gets in." If we do not admit our mistakes, our tendency to mess everything up - to fall, falter, and fail - then we miss the opportunity to experience God's forgiveness, and redemption, and grace. Nadia Bolz-Weber, when she was pastor at House for All Sinners and Saints, used to ask people to prepare for her or the church to mess up. She would say to new members, "Please decide on this side of that happening if, after it happens, you will still stick around. Because if you leave, you miss

the way that God's grace comes in and fills in the cracks of our brokenness. And it's too beautiful to miss. Don't miss it." I echo her sentiments.

Broken, Messy Beloved Friends in Christ, join with me in admitting our failings, fallings, and failures and let God catch you. May we be brave enough to witness God's creative and redeeming work in all the world and in our lives.

Amen.