

PENTECOST 13 2025 All Souls' **THE POTTER'S HAND & SELF-ESTEEM** dtw

Jeremiah 18.6/ Psalm 139.14 God says: Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand. I respond: **I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.** You may now like to say the response with me...

We have two symbols to ponder this morning: a clay chalice and a clay jug. Like those vessels, we are all uniquely shaped and formed by the Creator's hand. 'Formation' is a beautiful word; we use it much more these days when talking about vocation, spiritual direction, story and journey. When I was a student, we used the word 'training'. We train dogs and horses. Formation is a much better word for humans and particularly Christians: it implies a movement, a moulding, shaping, crafting and co-operation with the other. It is less independent and more mutual. It reminds us that we are not alone in the unfolding of our lives and that we are vessels to be used for something bigger and beyond our own making.

Today's psalm, Psalm 139, is one of my favourites. Let me read some verses to you again, this time from the NRSV changing 'O Lord' to 'my God': I will pause between each line; I suggest you close your eyes and use this time as a meditation.

My God, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue, My God, you know it completely.

You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them yet existed.

How weighty to me are your thoughts, my God! How vast is the sum of them!

I try to count them – they are more than the sand; I come to an end – I am still with you. (vv. 1-6, 13-18)

Most of us need a boost to our self-esteem. We all know what it feels like to be put down; some of us even grew up with an extremely negative view of our lives which was reinforced by some of the prayers we said or the liturgies we attended. The Book of Common Prayer is still alive and well in parts of Adelaide Diocese including here once a month. Before I could even read, sealed within my memory before the age of four, I 'bewailed my manifold sins and wickedness, provoking most justly God's wrath and indignation against me; the remembrance of them is grievous to me, the burden of them is intolerable'...I mean, how could I even get out of bed in the morning? The weight of sin and unrighteousness is too great! Seriously, maybe this theology has put some people off church; you may know someone yourself? Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing to inform people that our God is in love with us, wants us to come home, believe and breathe again. (Today is Fathers Day: let me reinforce that particularly to men – we so need to hear that good news)

While the Christian gospel has much to say about humility and placing the interests of others above our own, the second great commandment is to love your neighbour *as yourself* (Mk 12.31) If we are meant to love our neighbour as ourselves, how do we love ourselves? And if we don't particularly love ourselves, it may well be that we aren't doing such a crash hot job on our neighbours. Self-esteem is a very different thing to selfishness. A sense of pride is a very different thing to the sin of pride. The Christian gospel, in fact, teaches that in God's sight each one of us is infinitely precious. Right at the beginning of creation, God beheld what was formed, moulded, crafted after God's own likeness – namely, our humanity – and God blessed it. (Gen 1. 26-28) Sure, our sin has often denied and frustrated the divine plan, but God's love remains unconditional. It is the original *Blessing*, not the original sin, that still holds sway! Will you accept it, appropriate it and grow up in it to the maturity of the full stature of the measure of Christ? That is the Christian question. We are called and blessed to be a blessing. We are vessels to be filled with divine love – love overflowing into the lives of others. Remember that today when you receive the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation. You too are a chalice. Yes, you.

Hand out: The Prayer of the Chalice