

**Have a Little Faith in Me
June 29th, 2008**

Scripture: Jeremiah 18:1-11

**A sermon preached by Rev. Dr. Stacey D. Jones on June 29th, 2008 at
Northminster Presbyterian Church.**

A teacher asked her class of fifth-graders to write about their personal heroes. One little girl brought her essay home that night, and showed it to her parents. Her father was flattered to discover that his daughter had chosen him.

"Why did you pick me?" he asked proudly.

"Because I couldn't spell DeCaprio," the little girl replied.

How many of us make choices in life, not because they are our "first picks," but because we're afraid to pick them or don't know how to enact our picks.

The top business guru in the United States, Tom Peters, argues that the missing pick or what he calls "The Missing X-Factor" in corporate America is "Trust" (see his Liberation Management [1997]). In a world where "relationships really are all there is," says Peters, our inability to "trust" each other is the Achilles' heel in our current national prosperity and economic "boom."

Evidence of our "mistrust" of one another is everywhere. A few years ago a significant symbol of mistrust was erected in our nation's capital. Cement barriers were moved along Pennsylvania Avenue, where it ran in front of the White House. We had finally come to a point in our national history where our civilian population could no longer be trusted to drive by the president's place of residence.

Fear that some crazed car bomber might wheel an explosives-rigged automobile or truck onto the White House lawn overrode any convictions about citizen accessibility in a free democratic government to the people and places in power. The barriers stay up. The people stay back. Our mistrust seems only reasonable.

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If we don't trust the general population to be good citizens; neither do we any longer trust mothers and fathers to be caring, loving or even sensible parents. Many states have now passed legislation making it illegal to leave any child under 12 alone in any car for any length of time for any reason. It would seem our mistrust in the parenting skills of others is well-placed. Despite these new laws, every summer there are horror stories in the news of babies and young children dying because they were left for hours in a closed-up oven of a car on a blistering hot day. Our mistrust of others, even those we love, is taught to us at a young age.

We certainly don't trust any business or industry that is trying to make money. We have passed laws concerning every aspect of manufacturing, product labeling, worker's safety issues, fair hiring and firing practices, product performance and consumer rights. Yet all those news-magazine shows on television seem to have no difficulty in researching stories that expose the complete disregard for issues of safety, health and quality present in various businesses, corporations and organizations.

Can anyone forget the film footage of 30-day-old eggs being rewashed and relabeled as new and fresh? It is enough to send everyone running for a carton of frozen Egg Beaters next time they want an omelet. Microsoft continues to face charges of monopolistic business practices because no matter how good their product is or how much we rely on it, we mistrust anyone and anything with that much control and power. We naturally figure something must be wrong.

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When you're a kid, one of the great myths you believe about adulthood is that grown-ups "get to do whatever they want." In what is still Disney's biggest hit to date, *The Lion King*, that is the whole belief behind the young Simba's rosy-eyed vision of this future in his song "I Just Can't Wait to Be King."

No one saying, "Do this"

No one saying, "Be there"

No one saying, "Stop that"

No one saying, "See here"

... free to do it all my way!

Oh, I just can't wait to be King!

It's never quite that simple. In truth, adulthood is filled with deadlines, mortgage bills, tax forms, soccer-game schedules and more work than hours in the day. But it is also true that for most of us, adulthood is the most autonomous time of our lives. No one can tell us we must go to bed, eat our broccoli, or turn off the TV. We have more freedom of movement and freedom of choice than we really like to admit. One of the greatest fears we face as we grow older is how we will deal with a shrinking number of freedoms when physical frailties or fiscal difficulties make us once again dependent on others for daily support.

The text from Jeremiah for today graphically reminds us that no matter how independent we think we are; no matter how on-top of things we style ourselves; no matter how in-control we believe ourselves to be: The fact is, we are still essentially clay. We are being worked, molded, shaped and stretched by hands outside our existence. Autonomy and independence? Illusions we must see through if we are to take on the creative life that God's artistic hand is seeking to form in us.

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Jeremiah's observation that suggests being like clay in the master potter's hand doesn't mean we are likened to some shapeless lump, wholly at the mercy of the artist's hand. Ask any artisan and they will tell you that despite their preconceived plans, sometimes the material they work with refuses to cooperate; it seems to have other plans in mind.

Whether we are gritty or smooth, malleable or stiff, flecked with impurities or deeply flawed throughout affects the Creator's plans for us. The question is this: Are we willing to trust God with all our flecks and flaws, our foibles and failures, and trust that the Master Potter can make something of beauty out of the beast?

It can happen, if we allow the Potter to do the one, single most important part of creating a work of beauty: centering the clay on the wheel. If the clay is not centered, the centrifugal forces will cause the clay to explode and splatter in a wide circle of clammy chaos.

Trusting God is to allow ourselves to be centered in the will of God, allowing him to take the raw material we give him and slowly but inexorably fashion it into a vessel of both utility and beauty.

Can we have a little faith that God is able and willing to do just that in our lives?

John Hiatt expresses it well in his hit song, "Have a Little Faith in Me," made famous by Jewell in the Phenomenon motion picture. Let us listen as God says to us, "Have a Little Faith in Me." It is time to throw ourselves on the wheel; to cast our very selves in the center of the will of God. Yes, if we have a little faith in him, God can be trusted that much -- with our lives, our loved ones, our everything!