

**First Sunday of Advent**  
**November 27, 2011**

**Isaiah 64:1-9**  
**Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19**  
**1 Corinthians 1:3-9**  
**Mark 13:24-37**



*Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;  
we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.*

**Isaiah 64:8**

One of the programs that distinguishes Menaul is pottery making. At any time during the day one can enter the studio and see students at the wheel, shaping all manner of bowls and vases, and I doubt there is any classroom or office on campus that does not proudly display some of our students' extraordinary handiwork. Having a pottery studio in the heart of our campus is a constant reminder of our vocation as educators and a learning community, working together by God's grace to mold young hearts and minds into unique and beautiful vessels of the spirit.

There is something elemental, primordial about crafting pottery. The basic art requires no sophisticated tools or technology, no brushes or chisels or software programs – it is literally hands on, moistened hands on clay. It hearkens back to the very beginning: “then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” (Gen. 2:7) When I see our young people transforming drab mud to glistening artifact, I recognize one of the ways in which we are created in the image of God. We ourselves are creators. We glorify God when we create what is beautiful and useful and edifying. We create; we also destroy.

The prophet Isaiah's evocative description of our Creator as a potter comes in the midst of a lament over the destruction of Zion, the desolation of the land and the aching sense of God's abandonment. The prophet reminds God of the intimate bond between Creator and creation. “Father, you made us, you shaped us – remember us, come to us, save us; O come, Emmanuel.”

As we begin this Advent season we look on a world and humanity that seems so broken, broken beyond repair, the beautiful pottery of creation shattering around us. Like the prophet, we yearn for God to come down to us, to have mercy, to restore us. The good news is that the God who created us out of the dust of the ground has never abandoned us; the God who gives us life willingly gets his hands dirty, ever shaping us and forming us, having become one us in the man of Nazareth whose coming we both remember and anticipate.

Presbyterians affirm that God's community is reformed and always being reformed according to the Word of God. In this season of hopeful waiting, may we feel the hands of God tenderly forming and shaping each one of us, confident that in Christ God is indeed making all things new.

*Spirit of the Living God, shape us and mold us as your people, that we may be agents of healing and light in a broken and shadowed world, for the sake of your Word come to us in Christ Jesus.*

John Sitler, Menaul School Chair of Religious Studies

Monday, November 28, 2011

Psalm 79

Micah 4:1-5

Revelation 15:1-8



**Micah 4:1-5 (The Message Bible)**

*“But when all is said and done, God's Temple on the mountain, firmly fixed, will dominate all mountains, towering above surrounding hills. People will stream to it and many nations set out for it, saying, "Come, let's climb God's mountain. Let's go to the Temple of Jacob's God. He will teach us how to live. We'll know how to live God's way." True teaching will issue from Zion, God's revelation from Jerusalem. He'll establish justice in the rabble of nations and settle disputes in faraway places. They'll trade in their swords for shovels, their spears for rakes and hoes. Nations will quit fighting each other; quit learning how to kill one another. Each man will sit under his own shade tree; each woman in safety will tend her own garden. **God-of-the-Angel-Armies says so, and he means what he says.** Meanwhile, all the other people live however they wish, picking and choosing their gods. But we live honoring God, and we're loyal to our God forever and ever.”*

Do you ever get tired of watching the evening news? Perhaps like me you have come to the point when sometimes I think we should call it the Evening Bad News. Still, as we set about putting up the Christmas lights and decorations around the Menaul campus, there is an inner excitement that comes, an anticipation and a hope for change in the joy of the season. “Merry Christmas” makes me smile and stirs within me a trust in God and the hope in His word.

In these times of economical uncertainty, wars, national unrest, political bickering and even hopelessness, ‘God-of-the-Angel-Armies says so, and he means what he says’, can truly be the bulwark of our faith. The verses in this chapter of Micah hold so many promises for the believer. God will teach us how to live the life He has planned for us. His word promises a future in which He will establish justice throughout the world, and bring about peace. Nations will quit fighting and trade in their weapons for tools of prosperity, wisdom and hope. We can abide safely in His shelter, “under the shadow of His wings” (Ps. 91:4). We can faithfully live lives that honor Him in thankful recognition of the grace He gave us with the birth and sacrifice of His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

*Father God, Thank you for the gift of your Son. Let us never lose sight of the promises of hope in your Word, and in the joy of our salvation as we prepare for this year's Christmas celebration.*

Keith Cass, Menaul School Facilities Director

**Tuesday, November 29, 2011**

**Psalm 79**

**Micah 4:6-13**

**Revelation 18:1-10**



*In the last days the mountain Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; and it shall be exalted above the hills; and the people shall stream to it.*

**Micah 4:1**

Growing up with two phrases by Martin Luther King Jr, "I have a dream" and "I have been to the mountain top", I wondered about dreams and mountains and how they impact our lives. After years of doing so many things that I thought would make me happy and bring me peace, I realized that I could not find my dreams in material things or possessions. I often pondered if I really had the opportunity to take something before the throne of the Lord. What would I take to set at His feet?

Micah 4 expounds: "In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and the people will stream to it."

Reflecting on this verse, it became even more apparent that there were two issues that have stopped us from truly pursuing our dreams and also hold back many of my family and friends – fear and trust.

We are afraid to really trust God with our careers, family and future. I wanted to build my own temple and rest on my own mountain of accomplishments and not have to trust in the Lord for my well-being. I was afraid that truly trusting in the Lord would never be enough.

One November afternoon, as I was walking across the Menaul campus, there was a slight breeze that blew leaves across the Commons area. Stopping and taking in the moment, a pile of leaves rested in front of my feet. To my knowledge, they were not worried about a thing. I reflected on the peace in my heart and imagined I was at the Temple of the Lord. I wanted to cast my cares upon him and never take them back. I wanted to pile my mountain of issues, concerns and fears together like the many leaves swirling in the wind and trust God's "dream" for my life. Micah 4 allows me to visualize that the mountains and problems we fear are nothing but leaves before the feet of the Lord. They can be taken away with a slight breeze of trusting Him, and a proclamation of praise from our lips, as King David did in Psalm 79: "Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will proclaim your praise."

*Lord, thank you for the pleasure of allowing us to bring our dreams before you. Lord, give us the courage to trust you with all that we have, and help us to overcome the fears of our heart and place all our cares at your feet.*

Darryl Bryant, Menaul School Middle School English Teacher

Wednesday, November 30, 2011

Psalm 79

Micah 5:1-5

Luke 21:34-38

*Watch therefore and pray always that you may be counted worthy.*

**Luke 21:36**

With all the media noise about “Black Friday”, “Cyber Monday” and pepper spray attacks to purchase video games, it is easy to believe that Christmas is all about presents, new electronics, and fabulous meals. Raising our four children in that environment, Laurie and I worked hard to present a different Christmas message.

Santa did not come to our house; instead we bought simple gifts for one another. Besides the Christmas Eve service at our church, the biggest Christmas celebration was a birthday party for Jesus. Yes, we had a cake for him with about 1970 candles! Actually for fire safety we stuck with one candle. We each wrote our gift to Jesus on a slip of paper and symbolically gave it to Him. I know this may sound a bit reactionary and counter-cultural, but we were committed to a celebration during which we did **watch** for the Christ child to come to visit our home.

We wanted our Christmas to be like that of the Who’s in the *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. You remember, after the Grinch, who hated Christmas, stole all the Who’s trappings of Christmas and was at the top of Mt. Churnpitt in his sleigh to dump it all? At that moment he heard the Who’s singing and realized:

*Every Who down in Whoville, the tall and the small,  
Was singing! Without any presents at all!  
He HADN’T stopped Christmas from coming! IT CAME!  
Somehow or other, it came just the same!  
And the Grinch, with his grinch-feet ice-cold in the snow,  
Stood puzzling and puzzling: “How could it be so?”  
“It came with out ribbons! It came without tags!”  
“It came without packages, boxes or bags!”  
And he puzzled three hours, till his puzzler was sore.  
Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn’t before!  
“Maybe Christmas,” he thought, “doesn’t come from a store.”  
“Maybe Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!”*

May your Christmas be blessed with the presence of God’s son – and a whole lot more!

*As we watch for you this Christmas season, grant us the grace to put aside all that would obstruct our vision of you.*

Lindsey R. Gilbert Jr., President and Head of Menaul School



**Wednesday, December 1, 2011**

**Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13**

**Hosea 6:1-6**

**I Thessalonians 1:2-10**

*For we know brothers and sisters loved by God, that He has chosen you, because gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit.*



**I Thessalonians 1:4-5**

Nearly every year of my childhood, I would go to the Children's Christmas mass. The lights in the church are dimmed, and giggling children wander around, while their instructors try to line them up for their performance during the service. Finally, Mary and Joseph process down the main aisle of the church and are seated quietly until it is time for their part. The scripture is read more as a script, telling each young actor which star to follow, which gifts the wise men should bring. I am reminded that Mary and Joseph were once alive, and that Mary once gave birth to Jesus Christ.

The excerpt from Thessalonians reminds me that the scripture readings I hear every Christmas come to me not simply as words but also "with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction". I am reminded that Christ was born on Christmas to eventually die for *me*. Now that I am older, I go to the Midnight Mass. Still, I hear almost the same scripture and it still has the same deep meaning through the Holy Spirit. Even though a young Mary and Joseph may not be meandering down the aisle, I know that the real Mary and Joseph once wandered on foot to Bethlehem where she gave birth to the Savior. This Christmas I will remember that the Savior was born for me, and He died for me, because He loves me.

*God, help us to remember that the words you have given us are not only words, but are also powerful, meaningful and truthful.*

Holly Baca, Menaul Senior, Class of 2012

**Friday, December 2, 2011**

**Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13**

**Jeremiah 1:4-10**

**Acts 11: 19-26**

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; . . . and then I said “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.*

**Jeremiah 1:5-6**



As I decorated our house – putting up trees, wreaths, ornaments and stockings – I constantly had to put an overbearing thought out of my mind: *“This is the last Christmas you have with your family before moving out of the house and going to college”*. Of course, next Christmas I’ll be home to visit, but the thought of not living at home and never having things be the same again is scary. I knew my family was feeling the same way as we bickered less and put up more decorations than usual.

As I think about this passage and my fear of leaving my family, I sympathize with Jeremiah. I have always been a year younger than all of my classmates; over the years at Menaul, most of my colleagues have forgotten the age difference. Being a year younger makes leaving home even worse. Thoughts such as *“you’ll be out of the house, and at only seventeen”* makes the transition even harder. I feel myself hesitating with God, saying “Oh Lord, how will I make it through college? How will I make the right decisions to honor You? *For I am only a youth.*”

But yet in the previous verse, God had already answered my question before it was even asked. He knew me before I was even born; He made me and planned my life of purpose. As long as I constantly search for Him and walk with Him on the path, He will lead me to where I need to go. He put me in my family, in my school, and in my church that I might have the support I need to overcome my fear. For as long as I have God, I can conquer anything and experience new adventures through college.

*Dear God, please walk with us throughout our lives and help us to overcome our fears. Please be with others when they long for home. Let us remember You throughout the holiday season and throughout our lives. Amen.*

Miranda Paul, Menaul Senior, Class of 2012

**Saturday, December 3, 2011**

**Psalm 85: 1-2, 8-13**

**Ezekiel 36: 24-28**

**Mark 11: 27-33**

*I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.*

**Ezekiel 36:27-28**

A common athletic cheer shared by many cheerleaders and fans goes like this: "We got spirit, yes we do, we got spirit, how about you?" Then the opposing team responds with the same cheer and the volume of voices continues to get louder with each turn until it gets really loud. This is used to motivate and hopefully encourage the teams of competition to know their fans are supporting them. It is also a basic and good question we should ask ourselves on a daily basis especially during the time of Advent. We know to have spirit involves a lot more than just cheering loudly to one another. It is a belief in something and projecting encouragement through our actions and gestures.



In Ezekiel we are reminded that God brings people from all nations, countries, and lands and provides a common place and bond for them to reside. Yes, it does take time for us to build that community by getting rid of those things that cause us to separate. Some of those things need to be cleansed and removed so that a new spirit will take hold. Through the help of God we got that spirit, yes we do! When that type of change can happen then we respect our surroundings and feel a deep connection to the place we inhabit on a daily basis. We are then connected as a people and understand our relationship to our spiritual entity.

Pretty much sounds like the Menaul School community to me and how many people have, had, and will experience it. We come from diverse backgrounds and families, yet once we feel that connection to this place then we can see and hear that spirit. It is that special spirit that God has put within us about this special place. It is the unique connection, many alumni, current students, faculty, staff, administrators, parents, families, volunteers in mission, partner churches, and new visitors truly experience once they have set foot on this sacred ground. It is a spirit of love, respect, care, grace, and even anticipation that God has put within us. That connection of being part of something so special that has changed so many people's lives. It is this same spirit that we should have as we anticipate the birth of Jesus Christ. So as we prepare for the Christmas season and hear the cheer ringing in our ears, "We got spirit, yes we do, we got spirit, how about you?" May the spirit God has put within us be one of joy and patience as we celebrate Menaul School and the advent season.

*Our God, we thank you for allowing us to be your people. We open ourselves to your leading as you fill us more with your spirit. May our actions be acceptable in your sight. Amen.*

Rev. Buddy Monahan, Menaul School Chaplain & Religious Studies Teacher