

“Masterpiece”

I have come to believe that no matter how young or old you are, you can look back over your life and recognize what I call "Ah-hah!" moments. These are the times in life when you really get it! When something become so clear to you that you say to God, "Ah-hah! So that's what you meant!"

When my daughter Katie was doing her student teaching, she called me one day with breathless excitement and started right in on a story about a little girl in her class who had never understood fractions. Then she went on rapidly talking about how to actually DO fractions and frankly, she was way over my head at this point. Next she told me how, all of the sudden, the little girl understood everything and before I could even compliment her she asked, "Mom, can you BELIEVE IT? I TAUGHT somebody something!" Of course, what happened was that both Katie and the little girl had their own "Ah-hah!" moments.

You have had "Ah-hah!" moments in your life too, I am sure. Perhaps it took place on the playground when you first learned the lesson of forgiveness. Perhaps it was when you lost something that you thought was very valuable only to discover that you didn't really need it after all. Perhaps it was the gratefulness you felt as you held the hand of a dying parent or recognized the presence of God in a special song from the choir.

Whatever our "Ah-hah!" moments are, I am also sure of one more thing. We are not the same as we were before. To quote James Taylor in his song about the Magi visiting the baby Jesus, we must go home by another way.

Last weekend, I had another Ah-hah moment. My daughter, the same one who taught the fifth grader about fractions so many years ago, presented me with my second grandson. And

when I say presented me, I mean that I was the first one that got to hold him. This has never happened to me before. Like my daughter, I have always delivered my babies by Caesarean Section which means that the daddy is the first one to hold the newborn. Unfortunately for my son-in-law, he was in a wedding in Charleston when little Douglas decided he had had enough waiting and made his entrance into the world a whole month early. But what a moment for me.

As I held this perfect little child and got to be the one who placed him next to my daughter's head so she could welcome him to the world, the words of Psalm 139 flooded into my mind. "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." I am so cheesy that way with Scripture but folks this child *was* wonderfully made! Without prejudice I would say he is perfect!

And to make the situation even cheesier, as I held him and tried to give him the warmth that was he was missing now that he was out of the womb and into the cold, hard world, I found myself singing to him. Right there in the operating room.

Of course, I didn't sing a lullaby, like a normal grandma. I sang Sandi Patti's song "Masterpiece". "Before you had a name or opened up your eyes, or anyone could recognize your face. You were being formed so delicate in size secluded in God's safe and hidden place. With your tiny hands and little tiny feet and little eyes that shimmer like a pearl. He breathed in you a song and to make it all complete he brought the masterpiece into the world. You are a masterpiece. A new creation he has formed and you're as soft and fresh as a snowy winter morn. And I'm so glad that God has given you to me, little lamb of God, you are a Masterpiece."

But as much as I would like to think that King David wrote this Psalm specifically about Douglas, he actually wrote it about ALL OF US. You and I are all masterpieces of God! Listen more closely to David's thoughts. He begins by reflecting on the nature and character of God,

calling people to recognize who God is. This is because God is first and foremost the God who knows each of us. David believed that God knows who we are to the core of our very being, perhaps even better than we know ourselves. He knows our innermost thoughts and attitudes. Nothing that we are, think, or do is hidden from God.

And not only our thoughts but our words as well. David says that before a word is on my tongue, the LORD knows it completely. I find this thought to be rather daunting. God not only knows every word I say, but God knows it before I say it! Now, I think I have been here long enough for most of you to understand that I am rather forthright. So sometimes, I wish I could just put those words back in.

The last time I served as an Interim, there was a luncheon given in my honor. One of the Elders described me as "Refreshingly Candid" and from that back of the room my husband exclaimed, "So THAT'S what you call it!"

As I studied the Psalm, it made me wonder if the Lord knows what I am going to say before I say it, couldn't God just give me a heads up every now and then. You know, maybe a text or an email that says, "Julie, just keep your mouth shut Monday at 10:30." But God made each of us to be the specific masterpiece that we are and so God sends grace when we need it.

How overwhelming this must have been to David, who was all too aware of his own sinfulness. He understood that despite all of his shortcomings, even knowing him so completely, God still loved him. And he was moved to pen this beloved Psalm. During the adult class at vacation Bible school, I heard as I have many times before that this is a favorite Psalm for a lot of folk. When it was referred to in class, there were many smiles, nods and comments. And I believe that is because we share David's joy in realizing the completely unconditional love of our Heavenly Father who knows all about us and CHOOSES to love us anyway.

In addition, David's words are surely evidence that God has a plan for each of us. But while all of these things are wonderful truths, they also pose a problem – one that can cause us to dig deeply and decide what we really believe about God's power. What I mean is that some might read this Psalm and ask if we think God is all powerful or simply controlling.

Because it brings to mind an oft used saying of many people that I for one have a real problem with. Has anyone ever said to you, "everything happens for a reason"? Of course, they have. You and I have most likely have shared that sentiment as well. But as one who has specialized in pastoral care ministry for over 15 years, I find that this is NOT something that you say to a person who has found out that his wife is ravaged by cancer or whose son has been killed by a drunk driver or who has never been able to have a child. Because it implies that God somehow PLANNED this tragedy or sadness and I don't think that was David's intention. And personally, my theology just won't allow me to go there. I mean, after all do we really want to worship a God who PLANS these kinds of things?

You see, I believe it is precisely BECAUSE life sometimes DOES NOT follow God's plan that David asks the questions that he does. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? And the answer is NO WHERE. Even when life does not follow the plan, God is still there.

The amazing truth of God's love is that because you are God's masterpiece, when things happen that don't line up with God's plan, God will hold you when you weep. God listens to our questions and laughs when we laugh and embraces us when we make mistakes and then God helps us find our way back into God's plan. So I just can't believe in a God that plans tragedy and failure. He knows about it since He is omniscient. And at times He may even allow it, to

help us learn to trust in Him, but I just don't believe that God sends things into our lives to intentionally cause suffering.

This kind of thinking seems outside of the realm of the nature of God. The Psalmist who cried, "Oh LORD my God, how majestic is your name in all the earth" also says that we are crowned with honor and glory as being just a little lower than God's angels. So surely, God will not give up on his children when His plan is not working – we are simply too precious. And this is another great blessing from our Maker.

God knew that each of us would fall short, would wander, would make choices that are outside the realm of His plan. God knew that human sinfulness would bring about disease and heartache and war and poverty and all other kinds of horrors that I cannot ascribe to God's wishes. So while David's words do indeed remind us that God has a plan, they also reassure us that God's presence does not flee when *we* try to flee from Him or when circumstance veer out of control and cause us pain.

But the one thing that we can be sure of is that God has a plan for our salvation. Friends, you and I, and even little Douglas are only a SMALL part of the masterpiece of God's creation. The Psalmist says that we are the work of God's hands. This means that the One who designed the sparrow that the women sang so beautifully about and keeps his eye on also keeps his eye on you and me. And God is not going to give up on any Masterpiece that is part of the beauty and mystery of life and death, whether it is you or me or this particular body of Christ or this nation or this world until the masterpiece that God started has come to completion.

The Good News today is that God DID love each of us enough to make us with a plan, a place and a purpose. Some of us take a more circuitous route to discover our place and purpose, but God's plan stands firm.

This truth is evident when we consider that God knew that the only way to really accomplish His mission, to combat this thing that happen that God did NOT plan, was to send His son to live among us, so He did just that. Jesus Christ came to us and preached the message of repentance and redemption so that we could all have an AH-HAH moment when we recognize the depth of God's love. And by his life, death and resurrection he made it possible for ordinary men and women to become the masterpieces that we were originally made to be.

God' love in Christ reminds us that ultimately God's plan will work. That his Don did not die in vain but enables us to celebrate the resurrection that ID God's plan for all of his children. Thanks be to God that His immeasurable love is about the glorious redemption of human life – your life and mine. Life that is a masterpiece that God will never forsake. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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