

“SAVED TO SERVE”

(Matthew 9:35-10:4)

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**[PROPS NEEDED: (#1) “The Potter and the Clay” Video Clip; (#2) Beautiful Pottery display on altar, including Holy Communion pitcher, plates and goblets]**

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 6-8-08]

–I–

1. Read Text: Matthew 9:35-10:4 and Pray.
2. **[WATCH VIDEO: “The Potter and the Clay” (Time: 2:00) from Sermonspice.com]**
3. Here on our altar table we have a beautiful display of various pieces of hand-crafted pottery, each created with skill and precision by a potter out of the “*squishy, gooey, simple clay*” described in the video we just saw.
4. Now, many of us have created clay projects before – perhaps a long time ago in school (although they may have not turned out as nice as these are!).  

A–But somewhere, a potter takes and forms clay into something he/she desires – it has to have the right consistency, soft and pliable enough to be able to be shaped into the form desired by the potter, and yet hard enough to be able to hold and retain that shape during drying.

B–Of course, after the pottery dries, it still has to be decorated. So, the potter applies a special kind of paint called “glaze” that adheres to and protects the clay.

C–And then finally, as a way of permanently “setting” the clay in its form, the potter sets the piece in an oven called a kiln, and heats it up to between 2000-2500 degrees Fahrenheit for about 5-6 hours. <sup>1</sup>

D–And after it finishes baking and is taken out and cools down, the end result is a beautiful piece of pottery... like the ones we have on the altar table.
5. But here’s my question for today: Is pottery such as this created merely to be beautiful to look at? Or was it created for something more?
6. You know, in today’s scripture reading from Matthew 9-10, the disciples of Jesus had already been following him for a while.  

A–Verses 35-36 tells us that they had heard him teach and preach, seen him cure sickness and disease, and even experienced his compassion and love for others firsthand.

B–In a sense, we could say that – like the clay of a potter – these disciples had been shaped, glazed and even baked into followers who would take on the form and beauty given them by *their* Master Potter, Jesus.

C–Yet, I want us to notice that after all this time with Jesus, learning to be like him and to reflect him in their own lives, Jesus says something startling beginning in Verse 37:

[NRSV]: “‘*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*’ Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness” (Chapter 9:37-10:1).

[MSG]: “‘*What a huge harvest!... How few workers! [Get] On your knees and pray for harvest hands!*’ The prayer was no sooner prayed than it was answered. Jesus called twelve of his followers and sent them into the ripe fields. He gave them power to kick out the evil spirits and to tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives.”

7. Do you see what Jesus is doing here? First of all, he’s calling the disciples’ attention to the great needs and cares of the world around them. But then he’s showing them that *they themselves* are the answer to those very needs and cares.

A—He’s essentially saying, “*Look, you fellows have been watching ME teach and preach and minister to people for a while. And in so doing, I’ve been giving you an example and model of what true ministry is. But now I want YOU to go do it yourself – I want YOU to go and BE and DO for the world what I have created you to be and do.*”

B—In other words, Jesus is saying to them what he would say to any of us who claim to follow him – that we are NOT called to a life *privilege* by God, but to a life of *responsibility* for God – ...

1—...That as Christians, we’re not called to some private relationship *with* God, but to special tasks and work *on behalf* of God.

2—...That we’re not “*saved*” by God just to come to church and “soak it all in” (as so many “church folks” do) but instead (in the words of today’s title), we’re “*SAVED TO SERVE.*”<sup>2</sup>

C—He’s reminding them that the things HE did – things like teaching and sharing the good news of God, and healing the sick and diseased, and having compassion on those who are (as Verse 36 says) “*harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*” –those are the things his followers are to now go out into the world & DO!<sup>3</sup>

8. Think back to our beautiful pieces of pottery here. These weren’t created to sit on a shelf (or even an altar) and just look pretty. They are pretty and beautiful, for sure. But that’s *not* why they were created.

A—No. When a potter creates a piece of pottery, he or she expects that it will be *used* for the purpose for which it was created.

B—Well, just as pottery is made to used for a specific purpose, so God (our heavenly “Potter”) created and gave to you and I talents, gifts, and abilities that He intends for us to *USE* for His glory and kingdom.

C—In the words of the apostle Paul, “*We [humans] are what [God] has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life*” (Ephesians 2:10).

1–In other words, like our pottery up here, as Christians we weren't made just to "look pretty" at church, but to allow ourselves to be *used* by God in our world.

2–We were made to *BE* Jesus to those around us – our "*good works*" (which point others to God) are the "*way of life*" which we were created to have and live by.

9. So let me ask this simple question today: How are YOU living out your faith in Jesus Christ?

A–You know, are you doing *your part* to...

[..."*cast out*" the "*unclean spirits*" of our world, and to help "*cure every disease and sickness*"?] {OR}

[..."*kick out the evil spirits and tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives*" of our world?]

B–OR...are you just a "pretty Christian," sitting on a shelf (or a pew/chair) somewhere collecting dust?

C–You know, it's great for us to pray each week in worship that God would meet the hurts and needs of our world. But as we pray (as Jesus taught his disciples), we *also* need to pray that we ourselves would be open to *being* the answer to our very own prayers.

10. For those who are church members, let me remind us that one of the vows we made to God when we became members is that we would love God not only through our Prayers, Presence, and our Gifts for our church (that Jim Perry talked about last week), but also through our "*SERVICE*."

A–In other words, part of being a faithful follower of Jesus means that we *serve* God by serving others in some way through a ministry or program of our church.

B–Now, it could be helping with our children's, youth, young adult, or senior ministries, serving on a mission team (like the one that left this morning for the Mississippi Gulf Coast), serving others in our community through our annual "Great Day of Service" that we'll have again this coming September.

C–It could be helping others be drawn into worship of God by singing in the choir, or praise team, or helping in our multi-media ministry.

11. But whatever it is, it's a way for us to *Serve* God by serving our fellow human beings – for us to remember that we are "*SAVED TO SERVE*."

A–As the video at the beginning reminded us, "*We are [God's] clay,*" shaped and molded in God's image to be *used* for His glory and calling in our world.

B–So today, how are YOU fulfilling the purpose for which you were created? How are you serving God by serving others?

12. [PRAYER and HOLY COMMUNION]

13. [CLOSING SONG]

### **ENDNOTES:**

1. The process of making pottery is described in the article “How Pottery Is Made” by Nancy EV Bryk at the website [www.madehow.com/Volume-4/Pottery.html](http://www.madehow.com/Volume-4/Pottery.html).
2. Along this same lines, I’ve heard someone say, “*We’re not called just to ‘make a difference’ in our world, but instead to ‘BE the difference’ in our world*” – that “*We’re not called to ‘change our community,’ but to ‘BE the change of our community’*” – that as Christians, “*We’re not called to ‘take Jesus to the world,’ are instead called to ‘BE Jesus to our world.’*”
3. Notice, too, in Chapter 10:2-4 *who* these disciples were that were sent out... *not* professional “clergy” with years of experience and academic training, but everyday people... tax collectors, fishermen, even a political zealot. They were *ordinary* people called to the *extraordinary* task of sharing God in Christ with the entire world.