

# Handmade

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I've been through many phases in my life, as have we all. And one of the phases I went through was a bread-making phase. I had gotten the idea in my head that one of the nicest gifts to give a person is freshly baked loaf of bread. I had remembered the times when I had received such a gift myself – a cloth covered, still warm from the oven, loaf of bread that when you cut it steam rose with that fresh baked dough scent awaiting a slice of butter that would melt even before you could get it to your mouth. Do you know what I am talking about? Now I have lost you completely to your appetites. So I decided to teach myself how to make bread. I got out an old Betty Crocker Cookbook and found a whole grain bread recipe and went to work. I measured and I yeasted and I kneaded and I waited patiently for the dough to rise. And when that first loaf came out of the oven I was so proud and so happy. And I took it to the home of some friends and the great joy of seeing the smiles on their faces when they opened bag and turned back the cloth and smelled the fresh bread smell – was even better than I thought it would be. There is nothing better than giving some handmade, homemade gift away. It is a gift of time and thought and care.

Now the truth is that though I had tried a loaf or two myself, as did my family – I was somewhat blind and senseless to the fact – and my family were too kind to tell me -- that these loaves of bread that I had been baking were really not that good. Truth is, they were as hard as rocks. Dental work was being damaged on these things. But I wasn't allowing myself to believe that. So around the town and the congregation I was prancing dispensing these freshly baked loaves of bread that little

did I know people were using as doorstops. Reality finally came crashing down on me when I had delivered one of these fresh baked gems to an older couple in the church and about a week later they pulled up to our house. Out of the car they got with a nicely wrapped gift. How nice, I thought, a little thank you. So I opened it ... and it was a bread making machine. I took the not so subtle hint and realized that bread making was probably not one of my spiritual gifts.

I will not forget, however, how those early bread days felt. The time, the energy, the care that went into creating this creation that I would give as an offering. And the joy of seeing those smiles and hearing those "Aaahs" when the cloth was pulled back and the fragrance filled the room. There is something that stirs deep within one's soul when you participate in the creative moment. We literally put ourselves into our creations.

You remember the story of the parents standing outside the nursery school waiting to pick up their children on the last school day before Christmas – and when the time came the door flew open and the children came running to their parents to give them the little Christmas gift they had been working on. One boy who was running, trying to put on his coat and hold his gift – all at the same time, suddenly tripped and the gift flew from his hands and landed on the floor with an obvious ceramic crash. At first the boy looked at the scattered pieces in stunned silence – and then he let forth with an inconsolable wail. The father ran to him and thinking to help said, "That's all right son, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter." But the mother, much wiser said: "Oh, but it does matter ... it does matter. It matters a great deal." And she leaned down and wept with her son.

There is something etched into our DNA, isn't there, when it comes to the creative process? It matters – our creating. We are perhaps most in touch with ourselves when we are in touch with the creative side of our souls. It is one of the deep joys of life when we give and when we receive the fruits of creation. I suspect this congregation represents hundreds of refrigerators upon which are hanging the priceless treasures of our children and grandchildren. Refrigerator art – we call it. Every child produces it and any decent parent and grandparent treasures it, these pieces of creativity far more valuable than anything you would see hanging in the Ringling Museum. And why make such a

big deal? Because we know that it matters. It matters a great deal this creative spark that lies deep within us.

Isn't it why we say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth?" Maker. Creator. We are pointing, aren't we, to something we believe to be so profoundly true. That this existence of ours is a creative existence. That it began with a creator and it continues with a creator. The universe is a created and a creating universe. God is a maker. It is who God is – he is a maker. He is a creator. I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. We don't say, "Who once made heaven and earth." We say maker of heaven and earth. He is still in the business. We are not making just some philosophical claim that God was there at the beginning – that he was merely the one who lit the fuse for the Big Bang and then sat down and watched Wheel of Fortune. We say that God is maker. It is who God is. You can't stop God from making. From creating. Yes, he rested on that seventh day – but on that eighth day you can imagine that he was up at 6 and thinking about what next. What's next?

God isn't done creating, you see. If we have the faith to call him in the creed, Maker, how foolish of us to think that all of sudden he ran out of good ideas when the sun went down on the sixth day. Annie Dillard in a book I've quoted to you before, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, reminds us that of all the known forms of life that have ever existed, scientists guess that only about ten percent are still living today. As full as the world seems to be right now – what we have in the moment is only a fraction of what God has been up to. "Multiplying ten times," Dillard writes, "the number of living forms today yields a profusion that is quite beyond what I consider thinkable. Why so many forms? Why not just that (first) hydrogen atom? (No), the creator goes off on one wild, specific tangent after another, or millions simultaneously, with an exuberance that would seem to be unwarranted, and with an abandoned energy sprung from an unfathomable font. What is going on here? She asks.

The point of the dragonfly's terrible lip, the giant water bug, birdsong, or the beautiful dazzle and flash of sunlighted minnows, is not that it all fits together like clockwork ..., but that it all flows so freely wild, like the creek, that it all surges in such a free, fringed tangle ... the creator loves pizzazz."

So aren't we saying, when we say that we believe in the Maker – aren't we saying is that at the very beginning and at the very center of existence there is this creative force, this three-person artist, this atomic explosion of paint and clay – that wishes to envelope us and make us into creators ourselves. Henri Bergson, the French Nobel philosopher said that, "In creation God undertook to create creators." This is the image of God implanted within us. This is where we find our deepest joy when we are about the act of creating. We are most in touch with the Creator when we join him in his creating. This is when the soul most stirs.

Donald Frey was an engineer back in the early 1960's. He worked for the Ford Motor Company designing cars. It was a good living, designing new models. He was ensconced in the day to day trip back and forth to the office using his slide rule and pumping out cars like the Edsel and the Ford Falcon. Then came the moment of truth when one night at dinner with his family his kids turned to him and said, "Dad, your cars stink." What do mean? he asked. "I don't know," they said, "There's just no pizzazz."

Donald Frey, who died four years ago, was fond of telling people that that was the first day of the creation of the Ford Mustang – one of the great innovations in automotive history. What we call today, a classic. "There's just no pizzazz," they said.

Do you see what we get invited into when we say that God is maker? We get invited into the pizzazz! We get invited into the creative spirit of God who is still up to something. Like that taxi driver who picked up a guy from National airport, in Washington D.C., a tourist from overseas who just wanted to be driven to see the sites. So they traveled around and saw all the monument, museums and government building and then he took him past the National Archives. When they drove by the tourist could see the great etched phrase on the front of the building: The Past is Prologue. The tourist not knowing English very well asked what it meant. The driver said, "It means – you ain't seen nothin yet!"

Behold, God says, I make all things new. I'm looking for some pizzazz. Not just from within Godself – but from us! The created creators. This is the love language of God – that God doesn't just create lumps of clay. Unresponsive lumps of clay. But God forms us from the dust of earth and breathes life into us. Breathes life into us. Makes us come alive. Animates us. This is the great joy of God. But the even greater joy of God is when the animated ones – the created ones – start creating themselves. Taking the substance of the universe and making something.

These are the great statements of scripture when God invokes the word "Make". "I will make of you a great nation," he says to Abraham. "I will make with you a new covenant," he says to Jeremiah. "Go and make disciples of all nations," he tells the disciples. "I am making all things new," he tells the Church.

You remember, don't you, Jesus' great story about the three servants who get the different shares of talents to be responsible for while the Master is gone. And the five talent servant invests the five talents and makes five talents more. And the two talent servant invests the two talents and makes two talents more. And the one talent servant just lets his one talent sit there. Just lets it sit there. Buries it even. Hides it. Protects it. And the master comes back and he says, what did you do with the talent? That's the maker's question. What did you do with the stuff I gave you? And the servant says, You know, I was afraid. I held back. I had the lump of clay but I didn't put my fingers into it. I had my canvas, but I left it blank. I had my 401K, but I kept it for a rainy day. I had 24 hours a day, but I spent a lot of it in front of the TV, on the golf course and out to lunch. I had so much, but I didn't breathe life into it. I didn't invest. I didn't take the risk. I didn't make anything.

And the master says, "Didn't you know that I am the maker? Didn't you know that I love pizzazz? Didn't you know that I breathed life into you? Didn't you know that letting it sit there wasn't one of the options? Didn't you know that the great joy of life comes when you are taking what I've given you and you are making something of it? Something that speaks love. Something that reveals

beauty. Something that shows the world you care. Something that points to the Maker of Heaven and Earth. It doesn't matter that your bread might taste like a rock, the point is you tried.

You see only you and God know what your talent account is. Only you and God. Only you and God know what is possible for you to do tomorrow, next week or this coming year. Only you and God know. Only you and God know what you could do to make a difference. Only you and God know what gifts you have to share. What time you have to offer. What skills you can employ. What money that you can give. Only you and God know that. God knows there is beauty still to be shared. God knows there are poor still to be fed. God knows there is a creation to be nurtured. God knows there is peace to be made. God knows there are little minds that need shaping. God knows. The Maker knows. It's why he is still making. And what the Maker also knows is the joy to be found when with him we make some pizzazz.