

## **“Break The Mold”**

Romans 12:1-2

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoglund

The Woodside Church

February 2, 2020

When my parents asked my brother if he wanted to go to confirmation and join the church he said, “Why can’t we belong to one of those churches or religions where you get money for being confirmed?” He wanted some dough.

Students I can’t promise you’ll get money for being confirmed today, but I can give you dough. To celebrate your step of giving your life to Jesus Christ, I’m going to give you some dough – Play doh! It’s even the party Play doh – so make sure to go out and party with your play doh. Everyone loves play doh – you can squeeze it and shape it, mold it and make it into whatever you want and when you’re done you smoosh it back together and start over again. When I was a kid my friends and I loved play doh. And there was always that one kid in every group who loved to eat it – like Ryan Goldberg – you know you eat it Ryan, I can see it in your teeth– please don’t eat the play doh.

Why am I giving you play doh when you are clearly far beyond preschool? Well – this lump of play doh is your life. I’m sorry to stay but no matter how great you think you are – you’re just a lump of clay. Now don’t be sad – so am I and everyone else. The Bible says God formed the first people from stuff here on earth and then breathed life into us. We’re all just a bunch of living play doh. Truth is God loves what he creates or rather, God loves who He creates. To God we are not just lumps of clay. We are shaped in His image, we are His children, the children He loves. And that’s the first thing I want you to remember today: you are God’s beloved child. The God who created billions upon billions of stars – loves you. He knows your name. You’re not just a lump of play doh to Him. You are the child He loves.

You guys probably know I’m a grandfather to Ben, Isaac and Evelyn and one on the way. People ask me what do they call you and I say, “Pa” and people ask, “Is that short for Grandpa?” and I say, “No it’s short for Pa-stor Doug.” The one dangerous thing to ask a grandparent is, “Do you have any pictures?” “Pictures? I have a whole phone full of pictures.” I can bore people for hours. Now I think God is like a huge Grandparent – he goes around heaven boring the angels with pictures of His children: look at my

Natalie she’s so great at sculpting and painting

Jessica - what an amazing photographer and keyboard player

Ashley’s awesome with track, soccer and the tech team

Ryan helps out everywhere – even Vacation Bible School

Will is an incredible guitarist

Peter is so fast on skis and is great to have on mission trips

Brady is fantastic at caring for animals

Logan can wail on the saxophone

Lucas is terrific on clarinet.

This is really important – this is not just the most important thing you’ll hear today or this year, this is the most important thing in your whole life. You are loved by God – completely, unconditionally, eternally loved by God. You don’t have to prove anything, achieve anything, win anything, earn anything to get His love. You don’t have to score a goal, top your personal best, beat the school record. You don’t have to pass a test, get a perfect score on the SAT or get into the University of Michigan (‘cause not everyone can get into U of M). God loves you, God already loves you, God will never stop loving you. How do we know? God gave the life of His Son, the one He loved the most, to save you and me, to get us back. The Bible says,

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. I John 4:9-10

God’s love cost Him everything. When you pay that price, you are not going to change your mind.

Why is it so important that you know you are God’s beloved child? Because if you don’t you will make the same mistake nearly every adult has made: you will spend the rest of your life trying to get people to like you, accept you, appreciate you, admire you, adore you. Everywhere I turn, I see people hungry for love. And to get that love, they will do anything. They will even let the world squeeze the lump of their life into its mold.

When my kids were little they could mold their play doh to make it look like a sandwich. They used the Play Doh Sub Shop or, as we call it in our house, The Hoagie Shop. And they also had this one toy which squeezes the Play Doh into various shapes, stars and spaghetti. What is this tool called? The Fun Factory.

If you let it, the world will squeeze you into its mold. The world will tell you you’re not tall enough, strong enough, pretty enough, smart enough, thin enough, rich enough, cool enough. To get people to like you and love you, you’ll let them squeeze you into their mold. You need to dress this way, act this way, talk this way, walk this way. I’ve watched people so hungry for possessions, positions, pleasures, power, popularity they let others stretch, shape and squeeze them. The world tells you this is “fun” but all it does is force you through its “fun factory.” Which is no fun. Confirmation students: you don’t have to live this way. I want to spare you loads of pain. I’ve seen what happens when marriages and families are run through the wringer. I’ve seen people, who gave decades to a career, suddenly let go. I’ve watched people trapped by addictive substances they were told were “fun.” I’ve performed funerals for young people whose lives were tragically cut short by drink and drugs. God doesn’t want you to live this way. The Bible says:

With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you ... to give him your bodies... Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God transform your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good. Romans 12:1-2 Phillips translation

Students, parents, people of Woodside – Jesus wants to break the mold. Jesus wants to transform you. Jesus wants to set you free. This doesn't happen once. It has to happen every day. Every day the world wants to squeeze you into its mold so every day you need to ask God to set you free. That's why we tell you to read the Bible and pray every day. That's why we come here for worship and Youth Group every week. That's why we meet in Growth Groups throughout the week. That's why we do missions and go on mission trips. These are the ways Jesus breaks the mold and sets us free to receive God's love.

I love Confirmation Sunday because of the powerful testimonies I hear. But I'm also sad about Confirmation Sunday because I know some of the students will wander away from God and Church and get squeezed into the mold of the world. Do you know why Play Doh was invented? Do you know what its original purpose was? It was used to clean wallpaper. Long ago people used coal to heat their homes. Soon a layer of coal dust coated the wallpaper. It turns out Play Doh was really good at removing the dirt from the walls. Imagine how dirty it would get. The longer you stay away from God, the more of the world's dirt you'll get on you. But if you stay with God, if you talk to God, if you hang out with God's people, he will transform you – like a butterfly coming out of a cocoon. You'll go in a lump of clay and come out a masterpiece.

Let me tell you about someone who was one of God's masterpieces. This young man loved sports, good food and movies. In college he studied to be an architect. The week before finals in his last semester, he decided to drive all night and come home for a visit. In the wee hours of the morning in upstate New York he fell asleep. The car hit a bridge. It was such a remote place that the ambulance didn't come until 5 am. He heard a paramedic say, "I don't think this guy's going to make it." But he did.

At first, and for some time, he thought his life was over. He probably felt as lifeless and useless as a lump of play doh. He couldn't play sports. He couldn't stand or walk. He would always need a wheelchair. He could not stand it if anyone looked at him as less than human because of his handicap. While tragedy sometimes turns people away from God, he reached out and embraced the Lord. One of his rescuers, a lady named Angela, gave him a Bible. He read the Word of God and stood firm in the storm.

His name was Steve Yi. God transformed Steve and used him in a mighty way. Steve, along with his wife Gloria, led our youth ministry here at Woodside. Steve became a pastor and touched many lives of all ages. Steve went to be with the Lord in January 2013. On this day, February 2, seven years ago, the vineyard and the sanctuary were packed with all the people who came to honor Steve, give thanks to God for Steve. He didn't let the world squeeze him into its mold. He didn't let his handicap make him sit around like a lump. He was so filled with God's love and He shared that love with many.

Confirmation students – don't let the world squeeze you into its mold.

Break the mold.