

18 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2 “Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message.” 3 So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. 4 But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

5 Then the word of the Lord came to me. 6 He said, “Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?” declares the Lord. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel. 7 If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, 8 and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. 9 And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, 10 and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

11 “Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, ‘This is what the Lord says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.’”

## Reformed

Anyone interested in pottery? It’s okay to admit it here. Believe it or not I too was and in many ways still am interested in pottery. While attending PCC, I thought about taking a class but... the “art” students had a certain reputation. Besides that the classes filled up fast, either because students thought it was an easy “A” or there must have been a high demand for pots in the Portland. But it turns out pottery is a lot of work, especially if you’re going to go out and process your own clay. It takes time finding the clay, digging the clay, washing the clay, and then working it until it is the right consistency. And then after all that work if the clay isn’t right, nothing else will be either. It’s a patient process as the clay can be stubborn and spoil.

God has Jeremiah go to the potter’s house for a sermon. As the potter works, the clay takes shape and a pot begins to emerge when suddenly it’s spoiled. The mistake is not in the hands of the master but a quality of the clay but the potter isn’t done yet. He starts over reshaping the same clay into something else. God asks Jeremiah, “*Don’t I have the right to do that with my clay, my people - Israel?*” Absolutely. God has the right to do as he pleases with his creation - even people. What’s hard to imagine is what God had in mind for Israel. They were spoiled, stubborn, clay and God is working to reshape and reform them into his people.

How many of you are stubborn? Just look at all the stubborn people here they won’t even participate in our little poll. In many ways the warning God sent to Israel applies to us. God is concerned and cares for his people. If we refuse to bend beneath the hand of the master, like it or not

we too will be reformed and reshaped. Thankfully we have a God who is patient and continues to put up with us. We know who the potter is and what he has done to shape us as his people.

Israel was unwilling to bend. The Lord had formed Israel. He had brought them up out of Egypt. He made them a nation without any effort of their own (unless you count marching around a city multiple times) God was with them and delivered the land to a rag tag group of misfits who couldn't seem to get anything right. He made them great. He made them special.

As they grew into a great nation, a giant pot, the clay spoiled. There was something wrong with the clay. A hole, a piece of grit, or it had hardened just as Israel turned away from the Lord and hardened their hearts to him and the potter has to start over. "*The potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.*" no one would argue that the potter had no right to do this. He has every right to do what he wants with his creation. And this is the point of comparison the LORD wished to make. He has every right to do with his creation as he sees fit. He has every right to make what he wants be it plates, dishes, bowls, cups, vases, casserole dishes. If the clay will not serve for a vessel of honour, it will serve for a vessel of dishonour, just as seems good to the potter. What Israel doesn't understand is that if they continue to spoil and ruin the work, they will be reformed. If the clay wouldn't serve as a vase, it will certainly work as a bedpan.

God asked Jeremiah, "*Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?*" declares the Lord. "*Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.*" God speaking through Jeremiah calling his people to listen to the one who shapes their lives and watches over them. God is the one who raises up nations and destroys kingdoms. "*If that nations repents of it's evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned... If they do evil and do not obey, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.*" At this point in their history they are spoiled. Manasseh un-did his Father's reforms. He built up altars in the temple of the Lord. The worst was offering his Son to Molech in the temple of the Lord. God has in mind to use Babylon against his people Judah. He is busy reforming and reshaping his people for another purpose because they would not listen and Jeremiah ends with a lament as Jerusalem is destroyed and the potter starts over.

God has formed us. God formed Adam from the dust of the earth. Adam literally means dirt, earth. Which he molded and breathed into it the breath of life. God has formed and shaped us. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, knit together in our mother's womb by God who wants to bless, build up, and not destroy. God is our Creator, He can do with us whatever he wants. That means we have not right to complain to God that our life is not what we want it to be. We have not right to complain about his word or change his word even if we don't like it. The apostle Paul in Romans asks, "*Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'*" (Roman 9:20)

Like Israel God has blessed us but like Israel we often turn away. Sadly we look to the things, the goods and blessings we have around us to determine whether or not we have God's favor. - rather

than turn to his word? Or maybe we've set aside the greatest gift we have, "His Word" in favor of the traditions and teachings of culture or science, to get ahead or fit in. This only demonstrates what Jeremiah said in chapter 17, *"The heart is deceitful and beyond cure, who can endure it?"* There is something wrong with the clay. There is something wrong with God's people and if God did not spare Israel, what makes us think he will spare us if we stubbornly persist in sin? The sad thing is that despite the warnings of what would happen, despite the object lessons - Israel still wouldn't listen.

Jeremiah was seen as a crazy doomsday prophet. Under Manasseh, who ruled for over 50 years, Israel enjoyed relative peace and prosperity but the storms were on the horizon. The clay is spoiled. There was something wrong with his people. If anything we're the ones who would like to reshape and form God according to our will. If ever we try to fit God into our mold, remember, he's the one spinning the wheel, not us. The potter not only has power over the clay to shape as he wants, he also has a plan for the clay. He knows exactly what he wants to do with it.

Israel did not repent and God did not relent in reshaping his people. Jeremiah returns to the potter's house in chapter 19. *"Go and buy a clay jar from a potter...break the jar while those who go with you are watching, 11 and say to them, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired.'*(Jeremiah 19:1). God used Babylon to cart them off. He would use another nation to bring them back.

But the good news is that God, like a patient potter, continues to work with us, molding and forming us into the people we are called to be. God's guiding hand is always at work even among his people. God is the potter who shapes nations and uses them for his purpose and plan. In just 8 weeks we'll hear how Caesar Augustus, issued a decree that the world should be taxed. *And when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law,* The days came when the Lord raised up a King who reigned wisely and did what is right. God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us. Jesus is the vessel upon which God poured out all his wrath over sin. And seeing his Son's sacrifice he relented.

God has not tossed us marred pots or crack pots aside. He has not ostracized us he ostracized his son. Broken pots are useless. There are pot-shards everywhere - the word Ostracize comes from the Ostraca (as these potshards were handed out in order to vote who they would ostracize - exclude). Out of his great love he has taken the spoiled, hardened, stubborn sinner and reformed you like a potter into a work of art. You are God's workmanship *"created in Christ Jesus for Good works, which God has prepared in advance for you to do."* (Ephesians 2:10).

He has shaped and molded us with a bit of water and his word in baptism he shapes our lives and brings us to himself. There he forgives our sins and reminds us we are Children of God. With a bit of bread and wine he offers us his body and blood for the assurance of our forgiveness and

salvation. A pot doesn't hold much of any value, the value is in what they contain. God fills us with his gifts, his grace, his mercy. He fills us with his Spirit, the knowledge of the glory of God revealed to us through Jesus Christ. *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us (2 Corinthians 4:7).*

The treasures we carry are not our own and don't come to us because we're such great pots. But God fills us with good things. His love and mercy. He uses us for his purposes. We pray weekly, "Your will be done." And like a patient potter he keeps working with us, forming us into the people he has called us to be. You may be a crack pot, a clay pot, but you hold the greatest treasure in the world. The Word worth sharing even if you might be associated with the people in ceramics 101.

I wish I would have taken a class it wasn't until later that I found out not every potter is a crackpot. Professor Hartwig at the Seminary was also known to throw clay in the evening hours. He even had to rewire the block of Professors houses so he wouldn't kill the power when he fired up his kiln. The power to fire and create his pots came from the electric company. The power to shape and form our lives comes from God. He is the potter. We are the clay. Clay he hasn't given up on. Clay he continues to work, reshape and reform in the likeness of his Son. Amen.