

## **“Lord, Thou Art the Potter”**

Date: January 26, 2020

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Ephesians 4:17-5:2; Jeremiah 18:1-11

Themes: Change, Spiritual formation, Intentional Faith Development

Occasion: Intentional Faith Development, series

One of the fun things I used to enjoy as a youngster was playing with playdough. Do you remember that stuff? It came in a can and you could mold it and shape it into different objects. Most of mine turned into cigars or snakes or ashtrays. But it was great fun to squeeze it in your hands and feel the creative power of shaping it into something. The little animals I tried to create were rather pathetic, but it was fun.

The bad thing about playdough is that if you don't put it back into the can and put the lid on it after you're finished playing, is that it dries out and becomes as hard as a rock. It's not good for anything anymore and you have to throw it away.

That was child's play, but there are both professional and amateur potters who use clay to make amazing objects of art, and of functional use. I brought with me today several personal pieces of mine that were made by a potter, using the traditional spinning wheel.

I have a vase that would be used to carry and pour water. Two different communion chalices that were given to me, a plate, and a bowl and pitcher set. You can see how the potter fashioned a lump of clay into something beautiful and useful. That's the image we want to explore today – the work of the potter.

Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet tried to explain to the people how God would use their suffering to mold them, to help them become the whole persons their creator envisioned. The prophet felt led to go to the

potter's house. There he watched the craftsman at his wheel, shaping and reshaping lumps of clay, until they turned into objects of beauty.

Jeremiah must have wondered why the artist would often start over again with a pot, or a jar, that looked perfect to the observer. Surely the potter must have seen some imperfection for which he wasn't pleased. We can imagine the sensitivity of the potter's eye, and the control he displayed with his fingers as he shaped and reshaped the clay, over and over again.

As Jeremiah watched, he recognized the parallel between the potter and God, the clay and the people of Judah. "Don't I have a right to do with you people of Israel, what the potter did with the clay?" Jeremiah heard God say. (Jer. 18:1 TEV)

The story of the potter was written about 600 BC when Judah had a weak king by the name of Jehoiachin. The nation had fallen under foreign domination. Only 400 years earlier King Saul and David had ruled on the throne. Now, in only a few years, the monarchy would cease to exist. The Babylonian captivity had begun. It was the worst tragedy, the worst nightmare, the Israelites had ever known.

Up until now Jeremiah had been preaching a message of judgement against the nation, declaring that the reason for their downfall was they had abandoned God's ways. Now, Jeremiah would *not* stop preaching that Judah would be destroyed, but from that day forward there began to be a new hope in his message.

God had shown to Jeremiah that destruction was not the final word. Judah was clay and God was the Potter, a potter of infinite resources. The clay, though it was marred, could be salvaged. The wheel kept on turning and the Potter kept shaping and reshaping the clay, over and over again. Judah was still in God's hands.

The picture God presents to us through the prophet Jeremiah is brief and simple, and yet extraordinarily rich. The parable still speaks to us today. Each of us is clay in the Potter's hands, just as surely as Judah was. God has a design for each one of us, and who knows what we are to be - a vase? a pitcher? a candlestick? a chalice? Only the Potter knows.

Once we have learned to accept the fact that God is the Potter, and we willingly yield ourselves to Him, as the clay gives itself to the potter, then God begins to fashion and shape us. It would be nice to say that we have reached our goal and we are the completed project of the Potter. The truth is we are just now ready to begin to let God shape and mold us.

That's when our prayer life deepens. That's when we increase in humility and realize God is in charge and not we ourselves. That's when we realize we don't know it all, and we turn to the Holy Scriptures to learn anew what God's will is for our life.

So let me ask you this? Who's in charge of your life? Has your heart grown hard, like dried out clay? I know that each one of us is already fixed in our ways and fixed in our habits. I know that we're used to doing things the way we do them, and saying things the way we do. And maybe you've even said these words, "This is just how I am. Deal with it."

Perhaps you think nobody is going to make you change. You've got your opinions and you know you're right. You've got your ways and you like them. So, who is in charge of your life? Is it you, or the Potter?

Go down to the Potter's House. There's somebody sitting at the wheel who can change you, and rearrange you. Don't let your heart become hard like dried-out playdough or clay. Keep open to the voice of the Lord.

Watch the potter at work at the wheel. The clay can do virtually nothing to transform itself into an object of beauty. It must simply yield to the work of the Potter's hands. The clay needs to be soft, pliable, sensitive to the potter's touch, and allow the artist to shape and reshape it.

This is the work of spiritual formation – yielding our spirit to the work of the Holy Spirit. This is why we engage in the spiritual disciplines, to keep the clay moist and pliable. God does the work, but we must be willing. This is what we've been talking about for a couple of weeks, this thing called intentional faith development, or what some have called "the disciple-making process."

Now let me tell you, sometimes the work is hard. Sometimes God takes us through painful experiences. Sometimes life gives us experiences we wish we didn't have to go through: sickness, death, divorce, the heartache of a child who goes astray. Sometimes we grumble, "Why is the Potter doing this to me?" Be patient. God isn't finished with your life.

But sometimes the mess is of our own making. We can become willful and stubborn and insist on our way. In our sinfulness, God's image in us becomes distorted and we become hardened to his will. Any of the addictions of our time can reveal our hardened hearts: work addiction, drug or alcohol addiction, sex addiction, food addiction and on the list goes.

As long as we are content with our shape, the attempts of the Potter to refashion and transform us will threaten and scare us. But as we begin to realize what we really are – a child of God, and who we might become – holy and beautiful in the sight of God, we slowly let go of our desire to be in control. And we yield the Potter's hands.

Some of you here this morning have been broken by life, marred by circumstance, damaged by situations, harmed by poor choices. I've got a

message for you. Go down to the Potter's house. The Lord is down there; and God can take your brokenness and fix it; God can take your marred condition and heal it.

Once you yield your heart to God and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Potter begins to shape a new person, the one you were meant to be.

“Have thine own way, Lord; have thine own way.

Thou art the potter; I am the clay.

Mold me and make me, after thy will,

While I am waiting; yielded and still.” Amen.

Let us stand and sing of our faith, hymn # 382, “Have Thine Own Way, Lord.”