

Jeremiah 18:1-11- The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup>“Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” <sup>3</sup> So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. <sup>4</sup> The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. <sup>5</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>6</sup> Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, <sup>8</sup> but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. <sup>9</sup> And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, <sup>10</sup> but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. <sup>11</sup> Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you, from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

Luke 14:25-33 -- Now large crowds were traveling with him, and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup> Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. <sup>28</sup> For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup> saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ <sup>31</sup> Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. <sup>33</sup> So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

THE SAVIOR’S STATEMENTS IN TODAY’S GOSPEL READING ARE CERTAINLY DISTURBING, ESPECIALLY WHAT HE SAID ABOUT HATE.

HOWEVER, THERE ARE TWO THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND THAT MIGHT BE HELPFUL. THE FIRST IS JESUS WAS EXAGGERATING TO MAKE A POINT, ENGAGING IN WHAT WE CALL HYPERBOLE.

THE SECOND THING TO RECOGNIZE IS THAT THE ANCIENT HEBREW DEFINITION OF THE WORD “HATE” MEANS MORE THAN LOATHING.

THE HEBREW WORD WE TRANSLATE AS HATE CAN ALSO MEAN “TO LOVE LESS”.

SCHOLARS GENERALLY BELIEVE IT WAS THIS MEANING JESUS HAD IN MIND WHEN HE SPOKE ABOUT HATING SELF, OR FAMILY.

FOR EXAMPLE: SOMETIMES IN SPORTS-ESPECIALLY COLLEGE AND PRO, FAMILY MEMBERS MIGHT BE ON OPPOSITE TEAMS.

THIS IS OFTEN EITHER TWO BROTHERS, OR FATHER AND SON. AND WHEN THIS HAPPENS THE FIRST LOYALTY OF EACH, IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GAME, IS TO THE TEAM.

SO, IN THAT SENSE THE FAMILY MEMBERS LOVE EACH OTHER LESS THAN THEY LOVE THEIR TEAM.

A GREAT EXAMPLE OF THIS IS THE EXPERIENCES OF THE WILLIAMS SISTERS IN TENNIS.

VENUS AND SERENA OFTEN COMPETE AGAINST ONE ANOTHER, AND DURING THEIR MATCHES THEY HAVE TO LOVE WINNING MORE THE EACH OTHER.

FOR EXAMPLE, DURING THE 2001 US CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL THE SISTERS FACED EACH OTHER.

WHILE THEY LOVE ONE ANOTHER, IN A WAY THEY HAD TO KIND OF HATE EACH OTHER, BECAUSE ONE WAS STANDING IN THE WAY OF THE OTHER BECOMING THE CHAMPION.

VENUS WON THE TOURNAMENT AFTER A HARD FIGHT AGAINST HER SISTER SERENA.

BUT INSTEAD OF CELEBRATING HER VICTORY, SHE RAN TO SERENA AND HUGGED HER, SAYING, "I LOVE YOU."

THIS WAS THE KIND OF THING JESUS WAS SPEAKING ABOUT. WE CAN AND SHOULD LOVE BOTH OURSELVES AND OTHERS, ESPECIALLY FAMILY-AND YET WE MUST LOVE GOD FIRST.

IT IS THE PRIORITY OF LOVE HIS DISCIPLES WERE CALLED TO ENGAGE IN -THAT MOVED JESUS TO WARN THAT WE MUST COUNT THE COST OF PUTTING GOD FIRST.

OF COURSE, IN THE LONG RUN, NOT DOING SO IS COUNTER PRODUCTIVE TO OUR BEST INTERESTS, AND YET IT IS NOT ALWAYS EASY.

IN TRUTH WHEN IT COMES TO LOVING GOD FIRST, AS WELL AS OBEYING THE LORD, WE OFTEN RESIST DOING SO, EVEN WHEN JESUS CALLS US TO FOLLOW HIM.

TODAY'S OLD TESTAMENT READING OFFERS US A PARABLE GOD GAVE TO JEREMIAH, MEANT AS A WARNING TO GOD'S PEOPLE.

THE REASON BEHIND THE LESSON WAS THE REBELLION OF GOD'S PEOPLE THAT HAD REACHED A CRISIS POINT.

THE JEWS OF NORTHERN ISRAEL HAD ALREADY BEEN PUNISHED. THEY WERE DEFEATED BY ENEMIES, AND MANY WERE EXILED, AS A RESULT OF THEIR SINS AGAINST GOD.

NOW, THE JEWS OF JUDEA AND JERUSALEM WERE IN DANGER OF A SIMILAR FATE, BECAUSE THEY CONTINUED TO RESIST GOD'S RULE OVER THEM.

WHAT GOD WANTED JEREMIAH TO UNDERSTAND, AND THEN CONVEY TO HIS PEOPLE, WAS BOTH A WARNING AND A PROMISE.

THIS TIME, GOD'S MESSAGE CAME THROUGH WHAT WAS ENACTED RATHER THAN SPOKEN.

JEREMIAH, AS WE HEARD, WAS COMMANDED TO GO TO THE POTTERS HOUSE AND OBSERVE HIM AT WORK.

NOW, IT IS MOST LIKELY THAT THE PROPHET HAD ALREADY SEEN CLAY POTS BEING MADE, SINCE POTTERY WAS THE MOST COMMON VESSEL USED IN ANCIENT TIMES.

HOWEVER, ON THAT PARTICULAR DAY, GOD CALLED JEREMIAH TO THE POTTER'S HOUSE SO HE COULD FIRST OBSERVE THE CRAFTSMAN AT HIS CRAFT, AND THEN LISTEN TO THE WORD OF THE LORD.

GOD'S PURPOSE IN DOING SO WAS NOT TO EDUCATE HIS PROPHET ABOUT POTTERY, IT WAS TO OFFER A LIVING PARABLE ABOUT GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS PEOPLE, AS WELL AS WITH THE PEOPLE OF ALL OTHER NATIONS.

THE IMAGE OF THE POTTER SHAPING THE CLAY OFFERS A PICTURE OF GOD'S CONTROL, EVEN OVER THOSE WHO THINK THEY CAN MAKE THEIR OWN WAY IN THE WORLD.

IMAGINE WHAT JEREMIAH SAW WHEN HE WATCHED THE POTTER AT WORK.

FIRST, HE TOOK A LUMP OF MOISTENED CLAY AND THREW IT ON THE WHEEL SO THAT IT ADHERED TO IT, AND STAYED IN PLACE AS THE WHEEL SPUN AROUND.

THEN THE POTTER'S HANDS SLOWLY AND PURPOSEFULLY WORKED WITH THE CLAY TO PERSONALLY AND INTIMATELY MOLD IT WITH HIS OWN HANDS.

SLOWLY THE LUMP OF CLAY TOOK SHAPE THROUGH THE TOUCH OF THE POTTERS HANDS INSIDE AND OUT.

SOMETIMES MORE PRESSURE WAS NEEDED TO SHAPE THE CLAY, BUT OFTEN THE TOUCH WAS GENTLE MEANT TO GUIDE IT IN THE WAY IT WAS ALREADY TAKING FORM.

BUT AS ANYONE WHO HAS TRIED FORMING CLAY ON A POTTERY WHEEL KNOWS, THE CLAY DOES NOT ALWAYS SEEM TO COOPERATE. SOMETIMES EVEN IN THE HANDS OF A SKILLED POTTER THE SHAPE DOES NOT HOLD.

FORTUNATELY, A VESSEL THAT DOES NOT TURN OUT RIGHT CAN BE REDUCED BACK TO A LUMP AND SHAPED ANEW WITHOUT ANY HARM TO THE CLAY.

JEREMIAH SAW THIS WHEN HE WAS AT THE POTTER'S HOUSE. HE WATCHED AS A VESSEL WAS MADE, AND REMADE ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF THE POTTER.

SO ALSO, IT IS WITH GOD AND HUMAN BEINGS. WE ARE AS CLAY IN THE HANDS OF THE POTTER- EXCEPT, AND THIS IS KEY, WE ARE CLAY WITH A MIND AND WILL OF OUR OWN.

UNLIKE LITERAL CLAY, WE HUMAN BEINGS CAN AND DO INTENTIONALLY RESIST GOD.

THIS SOMETIMES HAPPENS EVEN WHEN PART OF US WISHES TO CONFORM TO THE POTTER'S WILL.

BUT THE GOOD NEWS IN THIS IS THAT GOD DOES NOT THROW US AWAY.

MUCH LIKE WITH ACTUAL CLAY, GOD THE MASTER POTTER, CONTINUES TO WORK ON US.

THE MESSAGE FOR THE PEOPLE OF JEREMIAH'S TIME WAS THAT GOD WAS ABOUT TO-REDUCE THE UNYIELDING VESSEL THAT TOOK THE FORM OF REBELLION AGAINST GOD, BACK INTO A LUMP OF CLAY.

THIS WAS THE WARNING THEY WERE BEING GIVEN, THAT GOD FINALLY HAD ENOUGH. THEREFORE, THEY WERE GOING TO EXPERIENCE DISASTER, UNLESS THEY REPENTED.

AND YET THE DISASTER- IN THE FORM OF BEING CONQUERED BY ENEMIES, HAVING THE TEMPLE DESTROYED, AND BEING TAKEN INTO EXILE-WAS NOT ABANDONMENT BY GOD.

IT WAS NOT A DESTRUCTION OF THE COVENANT, NOR THE END OF THE PEOPLE BEING GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE.

THE PROCESS OF DEFEAT AND EXILE, WHILE PUNISHMENT, ALSO HAD THE PURPOSE OF RESHAPING OF GOD'S PEOPLE AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

THE PROMISE HIDDEN WITHIN THE WARNING WAS THAT GOD COULD AND WOULD REFORM HIS PEOPLE.

CONSEQUENTLY, GOD PROMISED HE WOULD BRING THEM BACK HOME AND RENEW HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM.

IN THIS WAY THE WARNING OF THE PARABLE ALSO CONTAINED A MESSAGE OF HOPE.

FOR CHRISTIANS, OUR RENEWAL IS BY GOD'S GRACE FOUND IN JESUS CHRIST, THROUGH WHOM WE HAVE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SIN.

GOD WORKS WITHIN US THROUGH THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND WITHOUT THROUGH OUR DAILY CIRCUMSTANCES.

A REFLECTION ON THIS READING CALLED: "IN THE HANDS OF THE POTTER", OFFERS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS FOR US TO CONSIDER CONCERNING GOD'S ACTIVITY.

"...CAN YOU SEE THE POTTER AT WORK? THE WHEEL SPINS AND SLOWLY A LUMP OF CLAY BECOMES SOMETHING MORE...CAN YOU SEE THE MASTER POTTER'S HAND AT WORK UPON THOSE AROUND YOU...?"

CAN YOU FEEL THE POTTER'S HAND, HIS TOUCH IN YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES...?"

THE MESSAGE IS A CHALLENGE FOR US TO BE AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE, THE TOUCH OF HIS HAND, THE CALL OF HIS VOICE, AND THE COMFORT OF HIS LOVE IN ALL THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR LIVES.

THIS IS IMPORTANT, BECAUSE WHEN WE KNOW THE MASTER POTTER, WE CAN BETTER TRUST THE SHAPING OF HIS HANDS.

THE DIVINE POTTER KNOWS THE NATURE OF THE CLAY, FOR GOD CREATED IT.

GOD KNOWS AND LOVES HUMAN BEINGS AND EACH INDIVIDUAL IN A WAY ONLY THE CREATOR CAN. THIS MEANS GOD KNOWS WHAT IS THE BEST SHAPE FOR OUR LIVES AND WELL BEING.

THE DIVINE POTTER ALSO HAS THE POWER, SKILL, PATIENCE, AND PERSISTENCE TO WORK WITHIN AND WITH US, WHICH IS GOOD NEWS.

ANOTHER BLESSING OF THIS IMAGERY OF THE POTTER AND CLAY, IS THAT IT CAN APPLY AS MUCH TO THE CHURCH AS IT DOES TO INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS.

EACH CHURCH, EVERY CONGREGATION IS ALSO A VESSEL OF CLAY BEING FORMED AND REFORMED BY THE TOUCH OF THE POTTER WITHIN AND WITHOUT.

BUT LIKE JUDAH OF JEREMIAH'S TIME, WE AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A FAITH COMMUNITY, WHETHER KNOWING OR UNKNOWNLY, SOMETIMES RESIST THE HANDS OF GOD.

WE SEEK TO SHAPE OURSELVES, OR WE MAY BECOME SO COMFORTABLE WITH WHAT IS, WE ARE RESISTANT TO WHAT GOD DESIRES US TO BE.

CONSEQUENTLY, TODAY'S READING FROM JEREMIAH CAN BE SEEN AS A MESSAGE TO BOTH INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS AND FAITH COMMUNITIES.

IT OFFERS US A REMINDER THAT SEPARATELY AND COLLECTIVELY, WE ARE GOD'S WORKMANSHIP-WE ARE CLAY IN THE HANDS OF THE LORD OUR GOD.

THUS, WE ARE CALLED TO BE OPEN TO THE SHAPING OF GOD'S SPIRIT, LISTENING FOR THE VOICE OF GOD'S GUIDANCE CONCERNING THE CHANGES AROUND AND WITHIN US.

AN OLD HYMN EXPRESSES THIS: "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."

THUS, WHEN WE SING THE WORDS OF THIS HYMN, WE PRAY FOR OURSELVES TO NOT ONLY INDIVIDUALLY BE MOLDED BY GOD, BUT WE ALSO PRAY AS THE CHURCH TO BE SHAPED BY THE LORD.

HOWEVER, ON ANOTHER LEVEL THE CHURCH CAN BE SEEN DIFFERENTLY. THE CHURCH IS ALSO THE POTTER'S HOUSE.

INDEED, CHRIST'S CHURCH IS MEANT, IN PART, TO BE THE PLACE WHERE INDIVIDUALS ARE LOVED AND MENDED.

THIS INCLUDES THE CHURCH BEING ONE OF THE KEY PLACES WHERE GOD SHAPES US AND RESHAPES US AS CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS.

WHEN THIS HAPPENS, IT IS THEN THE CHURCH, TRULY BECOMES THE POTTER'S HOUSE.

FURTHERMORE, THE CHURCH AS CHRIST'S BODY IN THE WORLD, HAS THE PURPOSE TO NOT ONLY BE A PLACE OF COMFORT, BUT ALSO INSPIRATION.

WE EMPOWERED AND GUIDED TO SERVE THE LORD, BY SERVING OTHERS OUTSIDE OUR FELLOWSHIP, IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST.

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION REINFORCES THIS IDEA.

THROUGH IT JESUS SENDS HIS SPIRIT TO SHAPE US- BY BLESSING US AS HIS DISCIPLES, AND EMPOWERING US TO GO OUT AND SPREAD THE GOSPEL THROUGH BOTH OUR WORDS AND OUR ACTIONS.

LET US PRAY: GRACIOUS GOD, HOLY SHAPER OF HEARTS AND MINDS, WE PRAISE YOU, AND COME SEEKING THE TOUCH OF YOUR HAND TO MOLD US INTO WHO WE ARE MEANT TO BE.

LORD, AS JEREMIAH CAME TO KNOW YOU IN THE WORK OF THE POTTER'S HANDS, TEACH US YOUR WAYS IN THE READING OF YOUR WORD, AND THROUGH YOUR SPIRIT WITHIN US.

LEAD US WE PRAY, INTO A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR WAYS, THAT WE MAY BETTER KNOW AND DO YOUR WILL.

HELP US TO HEED YOUR SON'S CALL TO TAKE UP OUR CROSSES. AND, GIVE US THE STRENGTH AND DESIRE TO ALWAYS FOLLOW JESUS, WHO SHOWS US THE WAY. AMEN.

SERMON SUMMARY: JEREMIAH 18:1-11 & LUKE 14:25-33

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