

2022 09 04 - God the Potter

Scripture: Jeremiah 18:1-11 (The Inclusive Bible)

How many of you have ever created something out of clay? Did you shape it with your hands, or did you use a potter's wheel? Did you let it dry in the sun or did it you fire it in a kiln? Clay is a wonderful, magical substance that allows itself to be molded and formed into all different shapes and sizes. Once it has been dried, fired and glazed it transforms into beautiful and useful pieces of pottery. It becomes bowls and plates and cups that can go straight from the oven to the table and can even be washed in a dishwasher.

Clay is also a very malleable and forgiving substance. As the prophet points out in today's scripture reading, "Whenever the object of clay that the potter was making turned out badly, the potter tried again, making of the clay another object, of whatever sort the potter pleased." Any of you who have worked with clay know that while the mud is moist, you can just squish it back into a ball and start all over again.

In today's reading, Jeremiah, the ancient prophet of Israel, has been ordered by God to make his way to the potter's house. And when Jeremiah arrives he finds the potter working at the wheel. There Jeremiah hears God saying:

House of Israel, can I not do to you what this potter does?—it is YHWH who speaks. Indeed, like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, house of Israel.

I love this image of God as the Potter. In fact, for me it would be great if today's scripture reading ended right here at the end of verse seven. But it doesn't, does it?

Jeremiah's God goes on to threaten the destruction of the house of Israel. Jeremiah's YHWH is a wrathful, vengeful God who inflicts pain on those who displease him. Jeremiah's God is a Potter who would smash and then rework an entire nation on a whim. This is the understanding of God that we find in many places in the Hebrew Scriptures.

But as most of you know by now, that is not the God that I worship. I believe in a God of love, and peace and justice. When I think of God as Potter, I imagine the power of love working its way in each one of us and in the world. I imagine that love shaping and molding each one of us into a best version of ourselves. I imagine the Potter working through music and prayer and study and through the people in our lives who love and care for us.

Yes, that love could threaten the very structures of our living and cause great upheaval in our personal lives and in the life of our community, our country or even the world. But that change would come from the Ground of our Being, the Essence of Love, the God of Peace and Justice, not from a God of anger or vengeance.

There are so many ways that the Potter's hand of love is work in our world even now. On Friday I read a story about Pakistan in the CBC News. Here's a brief excerpt from that story:

Pakistan's armed forces have rescued 2,000 more people stranded by rising floodwaters, officials said on Friday, in a disaster blamed on climate change that has swamped about a third of the South Asian nation and is still growing.

Record monsoon rains and melting glaciers in northern mountains brought floods that have killed at least 1,208 people, including 416 children, according to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

Planes carrying fresh supplies are surging across a humanitarian air bridge to flood-ravaged Pakistan as the death toll surges and thousands of people are left at risk of disease and homelessness.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/pakistan-flood-disaster-child-deaths-water-borne-diseases-homelessness-refugees-1.6570750>

Now, if Jeremiah heard this story he might have come to the conclusion that the people of Pakistan had some how angered YHWH and were thus being punished for their actions. But I read the story and felt compassion for a people who are suffering from no fault of their own. In fact, [experts tell us](#) that Pakistan has contributed less than half a percent of the global emissions that have created climate change. They are suffering because of the actions of developed nations, like Canada, who have polluted our atmosphere and created this climate crisis.

As I read this story, I had to ask myself, what is an appropriate response? Yes, we could raise disaster-relief funds and that would be an important short-term measure. But the real question is what do we need to do in the long-term? What

are we being called to do? How are we being called to change? I believe that each and every one of us needs to consider our own role in reducing the impact of climate change. We need to be malleable, like clay, and allow God's love to shape and mold us, to change our hearts, our minds and even our way of living.

We may think that the required change is just too hard, that we are too comfortable, too set in our ways. But it is important to remember a potter can rework a clay pot that has been dry for days or even years. As long as it hasn't been fired in a kiln, it is possible to take even the driest of clay, smash it into bits, add water and rework it into another form. It takes a lot of energy and a lot of time before that dried-out clay is moist and malleable again. But once it is ready it can be molded into whatever shape the potter desires.

I believe the Potter's hand is already at work in our Earthcare Partners Working Group as they explore options like creating a community garden or planting a mini-forest. Each week they include information in our announcements in a little box called "Did You Know?" And each week as we learn more about our environment, we are being called to reduce our impact on God's creation. We are being called to allow the Potter to shape us in a way that is more ecologically sound, in a way that leads to peace and justice for all.

This is just one example of how the power of love and compassion can change the way we live and work in the world. There are so many more. But I want to end today's reflection with a prayer by Steve Garnass-Holmes. He calls it simply, *Clay*. Let us pray.

There are those who hope to get through life unaffected,
untouched.

But I say: life, affect me. God, touch me.

Let this life and all its pains and beauties shape me.

For whatever genius you place
in the wrenching hands of fate and all that befalls me,
you also work your art in me;
and it is only in the dance between hand and clay
that the masterpiece is born.

I'd rather be shaped by life than by my own little self.
So, yes, I will let beauty shape gratitude and wonder in me,
and suffering shape patience and gentleness,
and failure shape humility and perseverance,
and pain shape sensitivity to the heart,
and even loss, oh, the firm hand of loss pressing on the clay,
shape love and more loveliness, and attention to this day.

I will be shaped, molded and remade a thousand times,
because all the Artist ever means is to perfect me,
I who have always been, ever from the beginning,
dust of the earth you have gathered up,
shaped with loving hands, and breathed your life into.

Shape me, God,
create me again,
and keep breathing new life into me.

May it be so. Amen.