



**"Formed and Reformed"**  
**Rev. Lisa Kruse-Safford**  
**Jeremiah 11:1-11**  
**September 1, 2019**  
**9:15 AM Service**

An old friend of mine took up throwing pots on a wheel as a mid-life new hobby. She was good too. She made bowls for communion for the church we were a part of. One day she invited me to come and play. Now I had taken a ceramics class in college, but it was a hand-formed pottery; working on a wheel was a new experience for me. Peggy started off showing me how it worked...she made it look so simple and easy.

Simple, perhaps...easy, no! Especially not at first.

This is what I was able to make. Anything bigger and more useful was going to take patience and practice.

But what I experienced – like with any art – was a spiritual experience. Insights are gained and you can see things in new ways –

God called Jeremiah to that kind of experience...because God was going to speak something else to the people through Jeremiah. Listen:

***Jeremiah 18:1-11***

***This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." <sup>3</sup> So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. <sup>4</sup> 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.***

***<sup>5</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to me. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, <sup>8</sup> and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. <sup>9</sup> And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, <sup>10</sup> 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.***

***<sup>11</sup> "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.'***

Indeed, Jeremiah watched the potter and heard this word from the Lord for Israel.

It was a word of clarity –

That God was like a potter working with clay...

That God can do what God wants and needs to do.

That God is judge.

That God can act on that judgment

And if one's actions would lead to a disastrous judgment, then repentance is crucial.

Now, maybe you think: well if God is the potter, how could the vessel God is creating be imperfect....

***<sup>4</sup> 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.***

How does a pot, under the potter's hand, become marred? Is it the fault of the potter? Certainly that can be possible...but not if God's the potter, right? Nevertheless, the vessel can still become marred – and that has to do with the clay.

- 1) Working with clay on a wheel or with hand-thrown vessels, the clay has to be without air pockets and small pebbles.....for instance, say there's something in the clay that ought not be there. That imperfection becomes visible. An air pocket or bubble can leave a weak spot in the vessel. A pebble leaves a bump. Neither are desirable results for a useful vessel. But there's something the potter can do to deal with this. The potter takes the clay and works it on a surface; kneading it like bread dough. This helps bring to the surface any imperfections, and the potter can then easily remove those imperfections.

God has a process as well in dealing with us: sanctification....

Sanctification is that work that happens between God and human/between potter and clay that works through the imperfections.

Sanctification is the process by which we become sanctified or made holy.

Let me do a quick review of our theology of grace...teaches us that God works for us and with us to restore relationship with us.

- Prevenient grace – is the work God does to reach out to us before we even know God....
- Justifying grace – is the work God does to pardon us...it's what we cannot do for ourselves...we cannot set ourselves right before God. God does that for us through the forgiveness given to us in Jesus Christ
- Sanctifying grace – is the work God does with us. Once we are justified or pardoned of our sin, it doesn't mean that we don't still have sinfulness that needs to be dealt with. Sanctification is the lifelong work that God does with us to rid us of sin. For instance, a relationship hits the skids. God's sanctifying grace helps us to see our own contribution to the brokenness. (helps us see the air pockets or pebbles). But here's the thing about sanctification: it is not something God just does for us. We are active participants. God may bring it to our attention. God may give us the spiritual strength to deal with it. God is like

the potter, kneading the clay, bringing to the surface the imperfections. But we also have to participate in ridding ourselves of that sin.

*This is why we say, "we are saved (with justification provides) and we are being saved (which is the work of sanctification)"*

- 2) There's something else that can go wrong – particularly with wheel-thrown pots: the clay has got to be centered on the wheel or it comes out wonky...the centrifugal force of the wheel spinning provides for the creation of the vessel. But uneven centrifugal force leaves the vessel uneven and with weak places.

Living this life is like the centrifugal force provided by the wheel. Like how centrifugal force acts upon the clay, life acts upon us. And if we are not centered, we can have weak places.

Our metaphor of the potter breaks down a little bit here because with potting, the potter centers the clay and if the clay is centered, it doesn't move itself.

But we do move ourselves. Through choices and attitudes and actions, we move from being centered on Christ and his teachings. And when that happens, things can spin out of control.

Again, God's grace steps in....

The practice of the means of grace help us to become re-centered: regular worship, study, prayer, small groups; sure, life still places force upon us, but being centered helps create something special....

- 3) Finally, a vessel can become marred when clay has been worked because it dries out pretty quickly. And when it dries out, it becomes unmanageable and easily marred. As you saw in the video, the clay had to be refreshed with water to remain pliable...with hand-thrown vessels that become too dried out, the way for it to be refreshed is to be put into the slip bucket

In the same way, we need to be renewed and refreshed in our baptismal waters. We need to be renewed in the love that God has for us.

We need to be refreshed in the news that God has claimed us.

We need to be reminded of our baptism – of our relationship with God – on a regular basis.

That you've been saved.

That you are a part of the family.

That you have a place at the banquet table.

Friends, like a potter, God is shaping us - as seems suitable to him and for his purposes. So, let us share in the covenant prayer – a prayer to the Potter:

Wesley Covenant Prayer:

"I am no longer my own, but thine.  
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.  
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,  
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.  
Let me be full, let me be empty.  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely and heartily yield all things  
to thy pleasure and disposal.  
And now, O glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."