

Lessons From The Potter: Trusting©
Jeremiah 18:1-6 **February 21, 2016** **Dr. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates**

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Last Sunday as you were going out of the sanctuary, greeting me, someone asked “What is it you’re making up there?”

My answer was, “Whatever it turns out to be.”

You see, I love this wheel and I love having my hands in clay, as messy as it is, but for me – an amateur who needs a lot of practice, it seems like the clay has a will of its own.

That, in itself, could be a pretty good sermon, don’t you agree? God gives us free will; we can choose to be obedient, to be soft and pliable, trusting God to keep reworking us into His perfect plan, or we can choose to make our own plan and follow a different path.

Last week, I worked on this little imperfect cylinder. It wasn’t finished, by any means. I should have come back and kept it moist so I could keep working on it but, I didn’t.

It’s very dry, even though I left it with wet cloths covering it. It probably stayed damp for a couple of days but then, the cloth dried up and the clay began drying as well.

Now look at it. It’s hard, but it could be smashed easily. It’s dusty – remember you are dust. It’s very rough around the edges at the bottom, because no one trimmed it and smoothed it out. Truth be told – it’s worthless. It wouldn’t hold up in a kiln anyway because it’s too thick on the bottom and sides.

As I was looking at this hard piece of rough clay I got to thinking about how it’s that way with us. If we spend time away from the Potter – even a short time – we begin to dry up spiritually. We need the hands of God working in our lives; we need the breath of God breathing new life into us. We need our Potter God to give us living water; to lovingly shape and mold; trim and fill us for His purpose.

We heard Bob read the text from Jeremiah 18. It would have been hard to be Jeremiah! God called Jeremiah to be a prophet when he was just a boy. Jeremiah tried to back out, using that excuse: “But, Lord! I’m just a boy. I don’t know how to speak to people.”

But God tells him, “Don’t say I’m just a boy. Do not afraid of the people. I will put the words in your mouth and I will watch over you.”

So Jeremiah got to be a rather “bad news prophet.” God keeps sending warnings against Judah through Jeremiah, telling them they need to change; they need to turn back to God; they need to repent of their willfulness and their disobedience.

I'll bet when people saw Jeremiah coming, they ran and hid. The wrath of God came straight out of his mouth.

Yet, Jeremiah loved his country and the people and sincerely wanted them to turn back to God and live. Unfortunately, they were not listening. Their ears were not open. The people of Judah and Israel were worshipping other gods – they were creating their own destruction.

So God tells Jeremiah to go down to the potter's house and watch what the potter does with the clay. And so he goes. And the potter is working on something – a utensil or a bowl.

But in a little while, the potter sees that this thing he is making is blemished. Maybe it's wobbling and uncentered. It's just not what the potter intended it to be.

So Jeremiah sees the potter take his hand and smash that clay flat again, completely destroying what that clay was shaping up to be.

But the potter didn't stop there. He could have scooped up the clay and thrown it away, deciding it was too blemished to do anything with. But instead, he took that same clay and began working it, pounding out the rough places, smooth it out into a ball and throwing it onto the wheel again.

Yes, the potter started over, reshaping, remolding the same piece of clay. He put just the right amount of water in it to keep it moist and pliable. Of course it needed the air too, but water would keep it from drying out. He used his hands, his fingers, his palms to keep it in place – to keep it centered as it went around and around. He began again and made the clay into the shape he intended in the first place.

And God told Jeremiah that is how God would be with the people who had turned and gone their own way. God pointed out that He can do the same as the potter with His people. God, who is sovereign over all, can bring a nation down if they are disobedient. He is not playing games with them. He is God and will discipline.

But, God also says, if my people will repent and turn from their evil ways and return back to me, I will do as the potter has done – I will reshape them into the useful, beautiful vessels I vision them to be.

Repentance is a key word in Lent. We take this time to listen to God; to look inward at ourselves; to ask important questions like:

Am I on God's path, or my own?

Have I turned from God to do my own thing?

Do I need to repent and allow God to start over with me?

Do I trust God enough to give myself – body, soul and mind to him?

Repentance does require trust, don't you think? It's kind of hard, really, to go to someone and admit you were wrong and ask for forgiveness.

I told you the story of my running away (to the garage) when I was six years old and mad at my mom. Well, I did it again when I was 19 years old. This time it was much more painful for my mother and for me.

I had had a rough year, my first year in college. It didn't work out too good for several reasons and so I got a job at a clothing factory where I thought I would lose my mind with boredom. I was very unhappy with myself and so I took it out on my mom. Of course.

We got into a huge argument and I threw together some of my clothes and personal things and was getting into my car to – yes – run away, when my mother came running out to the front porch, slamming the door behind her, and holding up an 8x10 of my senior picture.

Through anger and tears she pointed to the picture and said, "If you see this girl anywhere, please, please, tell her I want her to come home!"

I have to admit, that time of running away was much more painful and hurtful to my mother than my six year old leaving. It took me a while to go back and beg her forgiveness – not because I wasn't sorry. I was very, very sorry.

I had a hard time going back because I was so ashamed. I hated that I had hurt my mom so much and yet I felt so unsure of myself that I didn't know how to do it without falling apart or if I would be able to truly say I would change.

The longer I waited, the harder it was, of course. But when I finally did apologize, I felt the greatest relief and forgiveness I had ever experienced in my life.

You see, my mother loved me beyond measure. She loved me unconditionally and she was just waiting for me to come to her so we could start over. God – our loving Potter – is the same way with us. God was the same way with the Israelites, giving them chance after chance to turn back to him; to ask for forgiveness and to be ready and willing to allow Him to reshape them.

The reason I was able to go back to my mom and ask forgiveness is because, as I thought about her and her love, I believed deep in my heart that I could trust that love – enough to go to her.

And I think it is the same way – even more so – with God, who created us and loves us beyond measure. God, who has this image of what He wants us to be – a useful, alive vessel for Him. I think we can trust God to know He will forgive and He will reshape, rework us – giving us living water and breathing the breathe of His Holy Spirit into us.

We could never be as happy and fulfilled with our own plans as we will be trusting in His plans. Let us sing this song with passion and love for our Great Potter. This Is The Air I Breathe.

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