

# Clay in the Potter's Hand

Jeremiah 18:1-12  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman  
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The prophet Jeremiah invites us on a field trip—to the potter's house. It's an ordinary place. We see the wheel spinning, clay pressed and pulled, reshaped by the hands of the potter. The clay resists; it doesn't come out the way it's supposed to. And so the potter begins again—not discarding, but reworking, reshaping, remaking, reimagining. Jeremiah says: **"This is how God works." God is the potter, and we—individuals, communities of faith, nations—are the clay.**

This image is both unsettling and hopeful. God is forming and reforming us into something new. If we resist God's shaping, if we become brittle or inflexible, we risk breaking. Yet even then, God can take what is cracked or ruined and begin again. Too often, this passage has been read as only a warning: that if people or nations resist God's will, God will destroy them. But if we stop there, we miss the deeper truth. **God does not discard. God reshapes.** God envisions a future for us beyond our failures.

The context of this scripture passage involves Jeremiah who is writing to a people and a nation that had lost its way. Corruption, injustice, exploitation of the poor, foreigners and widows were left vulnerable, and religious rituals continue as if nothing is wrong. All these and more had hardened their hearts. **The clay was drying out. And Jeremiah reminds them—and us—that God does not settle for vessels that perpetuate oppression, violence, and exclusion.** In other words, the vessel of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, is misshapen. It does not reflect the covenantal calling to be a people of justice, mercy, and hospitality.

Jeremiah's words are urgent: Turn back, soften your hearts, let God remake you before the whole thing collapses. Sound familiar? **Our own world shows cracks, signs our clay is drying out: systemic racism, climate change, xenophobia, economic exploitation, political corruption. These are the cracks, the distortions, the misshapen edges of human systems that resist God's justice.** We see vessels that bear little resemblance to God's intention for human community. Yet notice: **the potter does not throw the clay away. God does not discard creation. God reshapes. God begins again.**

This is what theologian Walter Brueggemann calls *"the radical openness of the future."* God is not locked into one outcome. **The future is not predetermined. It is contingent on our response.** If we persist in injustice, destruction follows—not as divine punishment but as the natural consequence of hardened, misshapen clay. But if we turn—if we repent, if we realign ourselves with God's justice—then God reshapes our future. This is not fatalism. It is profound hope. God has not given up on us. God does not leave us as we are. God's wheel is still turning. **Transformation is always possible, but it requires our willingness to be shaped and reshaped.** That includes all of us as individuals.

**We, the church, are also called to be clay in the potter's hands.** Yet, too often, churches have aligned themselves with nationalism, racism, patriarchy, or comfort. Too often, the church has hardened into a vessel of exclusion instead of welcome, silence

instead of truth-telling, charity instead of justice. Thankfully, **God is not done with the church. The potter is still at work.** We are called to let ourselves be shaped into a community of faith where love is the measure, where social justice is a priority, where radical welcome is extended to the stranger, where prophetic courage is the norm, and where healing is offered to the brokenhearted.

And as a nation, can we let God mold us into a people who care for the vulnerable, who seek racial healing, who protect the earth, who lift up the poor, who care about those who are homeless? As with us as individuals, and as the church, **God has not given up on us as a nation.**

This passage ends with a challenge: **Will we resist the potter's hands, clinging to our rigid ways, our comfort, our privilege? Or will we yield, allowing God to mold us into vessels of compassion, justice, and hope?** The good news is that no matter how cracked or distorted we've become—whether as individuals, as a church, or as a society—God is not finished with us. Again, **the wheel is still turning. The hands are still shaping. The vision is still alive.**

Let us not be hardened clay. Let us be softened by grace. Let us yield to the potter's hands, so that we may be formed into a vessel worthy of God's justice and love. Biblical commentator Dennis Bratcher summarizes it with this wonderful point. "It can happen, if we allow the Potter to do the one, single most important part of creating a work of beauty: **centering the clay on the wheel.** If the clay is not centered, the centrifugal forces will cause the clay to [fly off] and splatter into a huge mess. **Trusting God is to allow ourselves to be centered in the will of God, allowing God to take the raw material we give God and slowly but inexorably fashion it into a vessel of both usefulness and beauty.**"

**Our calling, as clay, is to be pliable. To yield. To let ourselves be shaped by God's justice and love.** This does not mean passivity. Clay doesn't just sit there; it responds to every touch, every pressure, every bit of water added to soften it. Our yielding is active. We become vessels that reflect the potter's intention – vessels of mercy, compassion, and love.

May the Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on us, to mold and use us. The wheel is still turning! The Potter is still at work – in your life, in our life, and in the world!

Amen.

#### Resources:

Chatgpt

Bratcher, Dennis, *14<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost*, September 5, 2004, Christian Resource Institute.