

WELCOME 4th August 2024 – 11th Sunday after Pentecost '24 B

Jeremiah 18:1-12

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs/GPs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & farther out into his world to you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.** That link will be on the web page by about Wednesday.

As we move into this week... **House Rules** – **Grand Designs** – **The Block** & others show the joy & trauma of remodelling this old house into something brand new. It's not just buildings that get reworked. **Beauty/Geek** – **10 Years Younger** & others like them get closer to home by reshaping the person inside the home...Creating & then re-creating a new image is the rage.

O *Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay?
As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand."*

God's people were called to serve God's purpose. Theirs was a call to service not privilege...to single-minded devotion & whole-hearted worship making God's justice, mercy & compassion visible in their lives. They were to be a light to the nations. But in failing to live out their calling God declared they would be remade by defeat, destruction & exile...God would crush them & reshape them again into a people of beauty & goodness, truth & faithfulness. God held the absolute right to shape, form & fashion his people into what he desires for his purposes. And do it again if they resisted his loving hands & his gracious plan.

God declared he would not cast the "clay" away; but that he would mould out the imperfections & impurities & refine their lives in the fire of adversity & discipline. By his grace God would make them again into what he has imagined for us – a vessel that carries his love & grace & his promise of eternal abundant life to every corner of the world.

Christ's hands are always around you to re-centre and reshape your life according to God's purpose.

"For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." – **Eph 2:10**

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Loving and forgiving God, you have gathered us in, from every walk of life to be your people. You have shared your love with us, sustained us in time of need, satisfied our thirst, and filled our hunger with good things. Do so again in this hour...Let your grace & love flow like rivers and your Spirit recreate that in us which we damaged this week. Remake us even now in the image of your Son Jesus Christ...Amen

Let's hear God's Word

FAITH CHAT:

1. Have you ever started a "project" & had to stop & start over from scratch? What does that feel like?
2. How are you experiencing the touch of God's hands on your life at this time?

11 Pentecost '24 B – FULLY ENGAGED: IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Fill in the blank for me... "A picture is worth _____" You sure? A friend sent me an article on brain research (yes I have weird friends) that suggests a picture could be worth 70 - > 100X that. The point was interesting...let's take a word "rose." Just the word alone puts in your mind a particular kind of flower...not daisy/lily/orchid...rose. But that might be all. A few of you might have mentally added red or yellow, but for most of us that's as far as it went. But...when we do this: "rose." Research suggests the image/colour/shading/context means some of you will have identified the variety (peace) as well as the times you've grown/tried to grow it...maybe the bush you have in your garden or when you received some as a gift...or when it was used as part of the floral arrangements at a funeral/wedding. Scientists say that a few of you (if we hooked you up to a brain scan) would be "smelling" it...the scent part of your brain has activated & whether you're aware of it or not, your memory has retrieved the exact aroma...How many words is a picture worth? Some of you are wondering if I can just put a couple pictures up instead of preaching...*No! Stop that!*

Every teacher in the room knows this...I've learned infinitely more about velocity, trajectory, momentum, rotation, angle of incidence, gravity & drift on the rifle range than at a chalkboard in physics class. Children's messages captivate all of us not simply because our kids are cute but because we intentionally make a visual link to a verbal message.

So God tells Jeremiah to go to the Potter's house...not that Potter, **this** potter...it goes like this: **The Lord gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, "Go down to the potter's shop, & I will speak to you there."** So I did as he told me & found the potter working at his wheel. But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so he crushed it into a lump of clay again & started over. Then the Lord gave me this message: "O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand." On the face of it...that's not much...a guy going about his work & God says: "I'm like that potter & you're like that clay." To the average Hebrew, that's not new. God "pottering" & "forming" things from clay is as old as Gen 2:7 *Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground.* That God would picture himself as a craftsman was not a shocking or new image...

What was shocking was that that was true about every nation on earth. **If I announce that a certain nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, & destroyed, but then that nation renounces its evil ways, I will not destroy it as I had planned. And if I announce that I will plant & build up a certain nation or kingdom, but then that nation turns to evil & refuses to obey me, I will not bless it as I said I would.** **All** nations & all people answer to God. Every soul is accountable to God who created us according to his design, desire &

purpose. Every last one of us. I shared on our website a couple weeks back 2 vss from Daniel...that have really stirred my praying & thinking & the same word from God is right here... Daniel speaks to Nebuchadnezzar & Belshazzar (father/son) kings of Babylon... **"...the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world & gives them to anyone he chooses...the Most High God rules over the kingdoms of the world & appoints anyone he desires to rule over them.** - Dan 4:25 & 5:21 All nations/all people answer to God. Every soul is accountable to God who created us according to his design, desire & purpose. Every last one of us. Daniel speaks in judgment over Belshazzar who has defied God & had a vision announcing his coming end. Daniel explains the vision saying "see ya wouldn't wanna be ya" **That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed; & Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two.** - Dan 5:30-31 Not just the king is crushed on God's wheel, but the nation falls into the hands of a foreign power...Medes & Persians. All nations/all people answer to God.

Jeremiah is confronted by an object lesson in God's sovereignty. All nations/all people answer to God. The history or day's news of a nation may be formed in the labour, toil & bloodshed of its particular people or leaders, but the hands "moulding the clay" fashioning the destiny of that nation are God's. God establishes people of every tribe & tongue, race & nation so that in **each** his justice & righteousness - his power & glory - the good beautiful & true might be seen & lived, fostered & flourish. God establishes nations so that in **every** place its people might worship him & live in the abundance of joy that only a right relationship w/ God can give. **NB:** the life & health **OR** weakness & death of a nation tribe people family church is directly traceable to its living responsive & obedient to God's design, desire & purpose. If a nation turns from evil toward God & the good...justice righteousness true worship generosity & compassion they will live. But if a nation chooses decadence self-indulgence hard-heartedness mean-spiritedness greed...inverts truth in pursuit of lies & deception ... They're toast.

God's people here & in every generation are reminded that we are in the hands of One larger, stronger, wiser than we are. In Jerusalem & in the Nth Kingdom ^{b/4}, they lived as if they were the masters of their own fate & this simple homespun image reminds them/us that they/we are not the deciders of our identity, security, or destiny. Those are literally & figuratively (in this OT children's sermon) in God's hands. **But that's GOOD NEWS.** Look what God says closely...**So I did as he told me & found the potter working at his wheel. But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so he crushed it into a lump of clay again & started over. Then the Lord gave me this message: "O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand."** **God's** hands never leave the clay. In the

crushing, in the pressing, in the remaking the potter intimately engages the clay. In the humbling & the healing the punishment & the promise in exile & eventual return it is God who holds their lives & knows their name & they His. We know that clay spun on the wheel released from the potter's hand will fly off in all directions...**2024?** But at no point does God relinquish his hold...they are steadied & sturdied as God continues his work in their lives...**And that's GOOD NEWS.**

Their lives/ours are not in the hands of some invisible 'force'. We are not subject to blind fate...random chance...lucky coincidence...Our lives are in the hands of a Person - Almighty God! The one who spun the stars & planets into their specific orbits & crafted the intricacies of the atom & the complexities of the human spirit holds personal concern & intimate investment in the lives of His children. Our loving God has his fingerprints on the workings of our lives. He caresses the finer points of our personalities & our person-hood w/ the firmest gentle care...God chose to be w/ us as a person in Jesus so that our lives could be remade eternally in his image & moulded into the heart of the Father forever by his death/resurrection.

But even more...**God** is patient toward his purpose. Unlike a faceless factory worker cranking out trinkets or TVs 10,000 to an hour simply shuffling the parts into the right order on the belt or in the box following instructions designed by someone else far far away - God has a vision for each item on his wheel. God sees each of us - *his creations* - as unique & crafts each to his perfect design. Paul would write, "**For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.**" - Eph 2:10 You are a masterpiece in the hand of God through the power & love of Jesus Christ. Do not ever let anyone tell you differently! You are not damaged goods. You are not junk. You are not mis-made or an accident of bad timing on your parents' part...a casual accumulation of cells. You are God's masterpiece! The Greek word there is **ποίημα – poema** Vic Pfitzner said it could be translated artwork, poem or song...because it is the combination of the verbal **AND** creative/artistic elements of the Word...You are a work of art...a literary triumph...a choral masterpiece! When you were born God saw the end he had in mind for you...glory...beauty...wholeness in him in joy a delight.

What we see & experience of ourselves & our lives is often far from that a far far from a finished product. We sometimes feel like disconnected parts/pieces...formless lumps of clay...a blob of a wet mess. But never to God are we that. He begins by seeing in you & seeding in you beauty & wisdom & love & power beyond all compare because God crafts you as his dwelling place. And his work in this life is not yet completed...**And I** am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. - Php 1:6

You see Jesus is the one who will mould & shape you by his Spirit into your fullest most abundant form of you there could ever be.

All that's required of the clay is that it yields to the Potter's touch. As it yields in the hands of the potter it becomes something of great value. If the clay fails to yield it becomes marred, damaged, so much rubbish in the garbage pile of eternity. God's people then & we now need to remember: Disobedience hinders the work of God in our **lives**. God's plan for us can only be spoiled by our own rejection of his hand upon us. We can become useless for God's purposes...except as a bad example ... which is what Israel & Judah had become. The same is true of a nation, a church, or a family. No greater damage can be done than that of an unyielding life. This was Jeremiah's message...the unyielding hearts of God's people had brought upon them the destruction they were facing...God's constant word to his people is "It's your move." And their consistent response...**"Don't** waste your breath. We will continue to live as we want to, stubbornly following our own evil desires."

Like the clay Jeremiah saw on the wheel, we frequently go wrong; go out of shape; tell God to take a hike. But when we allow ourselves to be remoulded in the hands of the divine artist, such mistakes & deformities are no threat to the final outcome. God desires not to cast the "clay" away; but to mould out the imperfections & impurities & refine our lives in the fire of adversity & discipline. **By** his grace God will make us into what he has imagined; a vessel that carries his love & grace & his promise of eternal abundant life to every corner of the world...revealing his glory & making his kingdom visible here in your life. God loves you & will not willingly give up on you. No matter how much your life goes out of shape you can trust God to continue to work w/ & in you, reshaping you lovingly & skillfully until all the beauty & wonder & likeness of Christ shows through. **Christ's** hands are always around you to re-centre and reshape your life according to God's purpose.

TAKE IT HOME:

The Potter's hands are on you.
If God were to reshape part of your life...What might it be?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Gracious Father, we praise you for your love & faithfulness...your grace which repairs every flaw & heals every brokenness in our lives. By your Spirit mould us daily to live your love & share it freely each day through words that are kind, thoughts that are gracious & actions that are loving. Make every relationship a reflection of you being made visible in us. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.