

Rev. Janet R. Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
13th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, September 4, 2022
Scripture: Jeremiah 18:1-12

Sermon: The Potter's Hands

One of the greatest images to describe God in relationship to his people is this picture of the Potter and the Clay that we read this morning in our scripture lesson. In these verses we can see the plan of our God to prosper us and not to harm us, plans to give us hope and a future.

Have you ever observed a potter at work? Probably many of you have. When we lived in Central Asia we learned that pottery is an important part of their culture and several times we saw a potter at work at his wheel. Our children's school even had a special teacher that just taught the children pottery and someone to make the clay.

The old-fashioned potter's wheel used in Jeremiah's day is still used around the world. It is a simple wooden framework, in the middle of which is a vertical axel. On top of that axel, laid horizontally, was a heavy stone wheel, and then on the bottom of the axel was another, similar wheel. The potter would place the moist, pliable lump of clay on the upper wheel, with his feet he would turn the bottom wheel, and that caused the top wheel with the clay on it to turn and as it turned, the potter would shape the clay with his sensitive, artistic fingers. The potter worked according to his plan. The potter would carefully study the lump of clay and consider its possibilities. He would form a mental picture of the vessel he would make and then he would start his work.

Jeremiah, who ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah in the 6th Century BC, is known as "the weeping prophet" because of all the sorrow that he saw and experienced.

The people of Judah had sinned against God, and he had pronounced judgment upon them. He told them that the dreaded Babylonians were going to invade their land, cause great destruction, and take many of them to Babylon as captives. Knowing that the

invasion was imminent, the people undoubtedly were downhearted. It was right in the midst of all this gloom and despair that God spoke to Jeremiah.

So, who was this weeping prophet in a dying nation who also brought such words of comfort and promise? If we look back at history we remember King Solomon ruled over the Israelites, God's people, in the tenth century B.C. However, the unwise actions of his son, Rehoboam, led to a division in which the kingdom was split into the Northern kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, each with its own king.

Both kingdoms developed into corruption and sin, despite repeated warnings from prophets sent by God-prophets such as Jeremiah. God warned they would be overtaken by conquerors.

In 721 B.C. the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians. The Southern Kingdom of Judah pulled itself together under King Hezekiah and avoided destruction from the forces of Assyria through miraculous intervention. However, Hezekiah was followed by his wicked son Manasseh. He was carried away by Assyrians and repented of his evil ways, but things got worse again as he was followed by Amon, a wicked king. Then, under King Josiah things got better, but after him, Judah was a mess of puppet kings placed by Egypt and Babylon.

Meanwhile, Assyria had been conquered by Babylon. In 586 B.C., the Southern Kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonian Empire once and for all. The walls breached, the Temple was destroyed, and the city walls torn down. Jeremiah served as a prophet from the days of Josiah through the last four kings. Jeremiah died in 570 B.C. For around forty years, Jeremiah spoke for God to the people of Judah. He lived through the siege of Jerusalem, along with the rest, and was there as the people were taken away as captives.

Jeremiah never married. His family abandoned him, and the people turned against him and didn't believe him. He was alone with the knowledge of the horrors coming for Judah, yet even knowing there would be consequences for their sin, his message was ultimately one of repentance, restoration and hope.

God was saying to Jeremiah, “I am not through with the nation of Judah. They do have a future, and I have a plan for that future.” So, if God had a plan for the people of that day and time, he has a plan for individuals today, for you and for me. God reminded Jeremiah at the potter’s house that day that God has a plan for every life.

What a great and awesome thing to realize that God who spoke this world into being and sustains it by his power actually cares enough about you and me that he has worked out a complete plan for each of our lives.

While the clay spins around on the wheels, it is never out of contact with the Potter’s hands. He is in constant contact, molding, shaping and bringing the clay along through his loving guidance. If he were to ever remove his hands, the clay would spin right off the wheel and would be lost. Therefore, the Potter’s hands remain there with the clay until it becomes what he desires it to be.

What a picture that gives us of our Heavenly Father that is our Potter. He has promised us that he will never leave us, nor forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 28:20)

As children of God, we don’t have to fear that the Lord will walk out on us and leave us to spin out of control. No matter how fast the wheels spin or what comes our way, we can rest assured that the Lord of Hosts and the Lord of glory will never remove his hands from us. He is always in touch with his clay!

Because his hands are always on the clay, molding and shaping, the Potter knows instantly when a problem arises. He senses the changes in the clay and begins taking whatever steps are necessary to correct the problem. God knows everything about us because his hands rest on our lives and is aware when things aren’t as they should be.

It is at that moment God takes the necessary steps to get us back into usable condition. We can never hide anything from God; God sees all. (Prov 15:3; Heb 4:13) He is aware of every thought, every deed and every motive and will allow nothing to pass before him. God knows when we need something, and the best thing we can do is be

responsive to the Potter's touch in our lives. He wants to use us for his glory, so we need to be formed and shaped after his will for our lives.

The Potter's hands are very patient. The Potter takes the marred vessel, presses it back into a lump and begins again. So long as the clay is moldable and pliable in his hands, the Potter will rework it and reform it until he is able to produce a vessel that satisfies him.

This is a picture of the work of our heavenly Father in our lives. Just like the Potter, God is patient with us and keeps working the clay, molding and shaping it as it turns into something beautiful.

Can you sense the Potter's hands on your life as he patiently and lovingly molds you into his image? Miracles happen in the Potter's Hands. Will you allow him to work his will in your life so that you can be a vessel of honor and glory to the Lord?

Put your life into The Potter's Hands. "Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way! Thou art the Potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will, while I am waiting yielded and still."