

that sometime we arrogantly assume the role of the potter (God) and try to shape our own lives and the results are disastrous.

The wheel on which the vessel is molded represents the circumstances of daily life that shape us; heredity, temperament and environment are largely beyond our control, but they have strong, formative influence. But God also uses His own circumstances to shape us and play their part: adversity and prosperity, sorrow and joy, bereavement and sometimes tragedy, trials and temptations.

It is critically important to note that clay doesn't have any value apart from the touch of the potter. Its value is derived from its capacity to receive and retain the pattern in the potter's mind. It is the art that gives value to the clay, not the material. Our lives like clay have limitless potential when they are yielded to the heavenly potter's touch. Why are some lives so vibrant, blessed and favored, and others drab, frustrated and difficult? The difference is the degree to which the potter is allowed to work out his plan and design for our lives.

2. The Vessel Marred

“The pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands.” (verse 4)

As Jeremiah was admiring the emerging vessel, suddenly it collapsed into a shapeless lump of clay. We are not told the reason for the collapse, but it is doubtless due to some failure in the clay's response to the potter's touch. This is also what happens in our own lives. No artist spoils his own work. The heavenly potter's design may be thwarted in a number of ways, the most common of which is the toleration of sin in our lives. Sin of any kind will mar our lives.

But notice the potter does not discard the vessel to the scrap heap. He does not throw it away. It is still in His hands. Thank God that even though we are marred by sin, he does not throw us away, we are still in His hands.

3. The Vessel Reshaped

“So the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him” (verse 4)

Here is God's message of hope. The potter did not throw the vessel away, but took the very same clay and made it into another vessel. The Scriptures are full of illustrations of marred vessels that the Lord has remade. Jacob, David, Peter, Paul, John Mark and the list goes on. As God did it for them he can also do it with us.

The potter uses the fire as well as the wheel. Without the fire the vessel will not retain its shape. As the temperature rises, the clay becomes purer. Every touch of the potter in our lives has a desirable end. The touches we sometime fear are designed only to remove the ugly things from our lives and shape us as God desires. Sometimes difficult and painful things happen in our lives and we wonder why? It is God at work in our lives designing us as He desires. To us it is like fire. Fire makes the pattern permanent.

St. Matthew A.M.E. Church
Bible Study
Monday, April 20, 2009

Jeremiah 18:1-6

God Of Another Chance

The prophet Jeremiah was heartbroken. Despite his tears and entreaties, his beloved nation had proven to be intransigent and drifting farther and farther away from God. His efforts to avert catastrophe had failed. Now it appeared that Israel would receive her deserved judgment. But it was at this point that God intervened and gave Jeremiah a vision of hope. God told Jeremiah to go down to the potter's house and there He would give him His message. (Jeremiah 18:2) Although Israel had repeatedly messed up God's plan of divine blessing, if it would repent and yield to His will, God would make it into a new nation and give Israel another chance. This is God's message to this nation and to us as individuals today. God's means of dealing with nations and people are very much the same in every age. The context and time may be different but His principles are unchanging.

Jeremiah was obedient and went to the Potter's house. When he got there he saw the revolving wheel controlled by the potter's foot. He also saw a pile of clay sitting there marred, unable to improve its condition, it had no intrinsic value. He also saw a pot of water used to soften the clay and make it malleable (useable) and he saw the potter himself. Then God spoke to Jeremiah and said, "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does? Like the clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand." (verse 5-6) God asserts His absolute and final authority. His power is so final and we are so powerless. The prophet Isaiah softens the picture, "O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." (Isaiah 64:8) God is sovereign in His power, but He also has a Father's heart. His sovereignty will never clash with His paternity. This is why God directs Jeremiah to the potter's house. All God's dealings with His frail and unfailing children are dictated by unchanging love.

What did Jeremiah see as he watched the potter at work? He saw:

1. The Vessel Shaped

Jeremiah said, "I saw him working at the wheel." (verse 3) The potter took a lump of clay and put it in the center of the revolving wheel. If he had put it a little to one side, it would have been lopsided, so he was careful to put it in the center. As the potter molded and caressed the clay, the pattern conceived in the potter's mind began to emerge. He shaped it first from without and then from within until the shapeless clay began to be a thing of beauty.

God is supremely skillful in the molding of human lives. He does not need to experiment and makes no mistakes. He never spoils His own work. The problem is