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***The Potter and the Clay***  
***Jeremiah 18:1-11, (Psalm 139)***

*The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord:*

2 "Come, **go down to the potter's house**, and there I will let you hear my words."

3 So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was **working** at his wheel.

4 The vessel he was making of clay was **spoiled** in the potter's hand, and he **reworked** it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

<sup>5</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to me: <sup>6</sup> Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. **Just like the clay in the potter's hand**, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, <sup>8</sup> but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will **change my mind** about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. <sup>9</sup> And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, <sup>10</sup> but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then **I will change my mind about the good** that I had intended to do to it. <sup>11</sup> Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the Lord: **Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you** and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you, from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

We want so badly to be **self-made people**, don't we?  
Especially in **America**.

It is very American to talk about a self-made person,  
someone who has made their **own way** in this world.

I think of my **Dad** when I hear the phrase self-made man,  
because he literally went from being a janitor at a university, to being a university president.

I think most of us **FEEL** we have made our own way and we are self-made.

But the truth for the people of God  
is actually different.

Don't you love it when God humbles us with the truth?

The truth is, we are **not self-made people**,

We are like **clay**, in the hands of the potter, our good and gracious God.

God created us, and is ***constantly working*** on us,  
Like clay on the potter's wheel.

In fact, we are ***God's precious creations***.

***Listen to some of Psalm 139.***

*For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

***14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.***

***What do you hear*** in those verses?

When was the last time you felt ***wonderfully made***?

And yet, that is the truth of human life.

God knows us from before our birth,

God is creating our lives,

Like a potter spinning clay on a wheel.

We are beloved children of God, ***formed and fashioned*** by God—  
Which is ***amazing***, isn't it?

Just imagine ***the difference*** in our world, or the church  
if we were to ***TREAT one another as*** such special creations!

The image of God as a potter is ***not unique to Jeremiah***.

You can find the same image in *Job 4:19*,

*Isaiah 29:16 and 64:8*,

*and in Romans 9:20-24* Paul talks about God the potter.

The word for ***potter*** comes from the Hebrew verb ***yatsar***,  
which means to ***form or fashion***,

and you know what? It's the very same word used in ***Genesis 2:7***  
when God creates Adam from the dust of the earth.

Our very existence is a ***creative act of God***,  
and it's been this way from the beginning.

In other words who we are and what we have,  
***is all a GIFT from God***.

Our talents and abilities, our bodies, minds, and spirit—are all created by God.  
I wonder, what that ***means to you***?

It's easy to *lose sight* of that truth, isn't it?  
 We easily rely on our own ways and our own pride.  
 And *think* we are self-made.

But in reality we are *God's creations*.  
 And we are *FAR from perfect*.

God explains this to Jeremiah in *chapter 18 verse 4*:  
*The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.*

Working with clay is apparently *very MESSY*.  
 I've read that a potter ends up *splattered* with water and clay  
 from head to toe after turning clay on the wheel.

I've never used a potter's wheel.  
 My only comparison is *play dough*.  
 When my kids were little I didn't let them play with it very often----  
 because it's so messy.  
 The *play-dough aftermath*, as most parents will tell you, is not pretty.  
 All those little leftover pieces of dough fall into the crevices of the floor,  
 little bits of dough stick to every surface,  
 and pieces usually find their way into ear canals, pockets, fingernails, and even  
 noses.

The fact that you can *shape play dough into almost anything*  
 blurs the line between what is real and edible,  
 and what can send you to the emergency room .... you get the picture.

The process of creating is wonderful, But it's *also messy*!  
 Sometimes I wonder if after God said, "it is good",  
*God said, "It is MESSY"*.

Do any of you have a *hobby like pottery*?  
 I love to *sew*, and working on a new quilt or project can also make a huge mess!  
 But the *mess* is part of the fun.  
 It's all part of the creative process.

What do *you like to create*?  
 Maybe a garden, or restoring cars,

maybe you like to paint, or carve, or write?

And what happens to the mess?

***What happens to YOUR scraps?***

I think for a lot of people the ***scraps or LEFTOVERS***,  
the little bits and pieces are just as important as the main creation.  
I know you don't throw out fabric scraps  
because you never know when you can use them for something else!

I was reading about how potters are the same way—  
they often have a ***bucket of scraps***,  
and those scraps can be reworked into something new!

A potter's house would have been ***very familiar*** in Jeremiah's day,  
Pottery was used for everything from bricks, to lamps, pots, jewelry, even toys.  
And potters would rework clay to get it just right.

Listen to verse 4, again:

*The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand,  
and he **reworked** it into another vessel,  
as seemed good to him.*

That's a pretty big statement about ***FAITH, and our relationship with God.***

When the clay didn't work out the way he wanted,  
the potter reworked it into another vessel as seemed ***GOOD*** to him.

***What does that mean to YOU?***

It sounds cliché, but I hear that and look at our crazy world,  
And think thank goodness,

***God isn't done with us yet!***

God is ***constantly working*** on us.

We are made in the image of God—but forming us is a ***life-long process!***

I think this is ***great news.***

I think it's what Paul was talking about in Philippians:

***Phil 1:6*** says, *I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.*

***Philippians 2:13*** says, *for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

But, we can easily forget this, and **give up** on people, even ourselves.

Have you ever **wanted to just give up** on someone?

Or some **situation**?

I know I have a couple people in my life I've been tempted to give up on.

I know that there are some situations in our world that seem hopeless.

The good news is, **God never gives up.**

We are **all works in progress.**

God can and will make our lives into something good—

**when we surrender** to God's work in us.

We don't **need to give up** on anyone else,

And we certainly don't need to give up on **ourselves.**

But that's what happens sometimes, isn't it?

We can get so down about someone we love,

we wonder if things will ever change.

We **resign ourselves** to a bad ending.

But a potter doesn't do that—

**she keeps working the clay,**

even if it means **collapsing the whole thing** and starting over!

You know, the image of a potter and clay

says something else **really important about our loving God**—

God is **SO invested** in every aspect of our lives.

Because God knows everything about us.

We heard it in **Psalm 139:1-6**

*O Lord, you have searched me and known me.*

*2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.*

*3 You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.*

*4 Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.*

Those are some **powerful words**, aren't they?

You know what else is powerful?

God the Master Potter **knows what he's doing.**

It's not like you put clay on a wheel for a bowl and accidentally make a vase.

God knows what he wants to make in our lives.  
 God knows what is **BEST** for us,  
 And God **just KEEPS working** on us, to make our lives good.

I don't know about you, but that's a relief to me!  
 That God is **using everything in our lives** to make us who we are.  
**Even the PAINFUL stuff—the stuff that seems to be scraps—**  
 it's all a **part** of us—it makes us who we are.

But, does the work of God the potter mean **we DON'T have free will?**  
 That everything is **predetermined?**

No, and actually if you keep reading Jeremiah 18,  
 you'll see that's where the metaphor of a potter and clay kind of breaks down,  
 because God says I can destroy you,  
 but **if you REPENT, and change your ways** I will change my mind about that.

Clay can't change it's mind.  
 But **people can.**  
**And God can too.**

Not only do we have free will,  
 but this text affirms that **OUR ACTIONS affect God's will!**  
 We can change God's mind, which is a pretty wild thing to consider!

Remember when Jesus was teaching his disciples to **pray always**,  
 and not lose heart?  
 He told them about a **widow** who kept pestering a judge until she got justice.  
 In other words, when we keep praying, things happen!

What if the same is true of following Jesus?  
 Like, when we make choices to be like Him,  
 we are taking part in the process **of becoming new creations,**  
**and creating a better world!**

One **day each one of us**,  
 and all creation will be redeemed, made perfect and new!

You know, this text from Jeremiah 18—  
 was a both **a promise and a WARNING** to God's people in Judah

who were being exiled to Babylon.

Many of them had turned away from God, following idols and pagan gods.

It's an important reminder for us today—

***we are called to follow God, and NO ONE ELSE.***

No leader, no group, no person—only God, only Jesus.

And God is not just working on us individuals.

God is working on us as ***a people of faith.***

And, God can rework us as a ***CHURCH***, and a ***community.***

***Do we realize this at FPC?***

The God who threatens to destroy the first batch of clay and start over again is the same God who says later in **Jeremiah 29:11**--*I know the plans I have for you, plans for good and not for evil, plans to give you a future with hope.*

***God has GREAT PLANS for us.***

God is a potter who transforms us into ***more faithful people.***

God is an ***artist***, and we are the artwork in progress.

We are created in God's image, ***to love God and neighbor.***

We are made in the image of God, and transformed into the perfect image of that Love, the love we see in Jesus Christ.

As *the Psalmist* says, "we are ***wonderfully made***".

***And God is still working on us.***

As we leave today—let's ***surrender*** our lives, to the potter's wheel,

Let's ***repent*** for what we've done wrong,

so that ***God can rework our hearts.***

And let's ***surrender all the people and situations*** that seem ***hopeless.***

Because God has the power to change that.

Hear the ***good news of the gospel***—***God isn't done with us yet.***

No pain is permanent.

No mistakes are forever.

*The same way the potter reworks the clay, God is working on us,*

And for that ***Good News, all God's people can say together, Amen.***