

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you O God, my strength and my joy... Amen.

I have never had the opportunity to work with clay on a wheel, but I have seen movies and a plethora of pictures capturing this beautiful interaction between potter and clay...

For example, there is the dynamic image of clay spinning on a wheel, taking many different shapes and forms as the potter molds the clay.

And then there is the intimate and sacred image of hands. Hands that need to be delicate yet forceful. Hands that are always covered in clay, making it hard to tell where the clay ends and where the hands begin.

Hands that through touch, are able to bring meaning into existence.

And meaning is so important to all humans, clay-workers or not, as it is through meaning that we find zest and vitality in life.

Meaning making provides us with substance and helps us to make sense of life and relationships, giving us energy and purpose.

And if I were to ask each one of you, what brings meaning to your life...

I know that each answer will be unique. Even if two or more people have the same or similar answer, the meaning behind each answer will be different from the other...

While at the same time, I am also guessing that most of your answers will be similar... Because humans tend to find meaning in similar things... Like one's vocation, spirituality, and relationships.

Which is why this passage from Jeremiah, well at least at the start of it, is so beautiful.

As this passage illustrates a very intimate relationship. One where the potter seems to become a part of the clay, and where parts of the clay cling to the potter.

Where at first glance one might think that the potter is in ultimate control, but in reality, it all comes down to the potter's relationship with the clay, the quality of the clay, and how the clay responds to the potter's touch.

And then our beautiful poetic text in Jeremiah takes an abrupt turn...

Where we hear the fire and brimstone words of God...

"Thus says God: 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."

Words that are hard to hear and words that are hard to ignore...

However, words that have a deeper meaning when we take the text as a whole and start to truly dig into what God is doing in this text.

And so, to help us carve our way into the text, let's take a step back and acknowledge when this text was from...

As with most of the prophets from the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah comes from a time when faith was understood communally, as faith was lived out publicly in the community.

Yes, individual actions mattered, but what really mattered was how the Israelites lived together, how they followed God's commandments, and how they worshiped God as one...

Or, as is common with the Old Testament prophets, the focus was more so on how the Israelites were not following God's commandments, how they were not worshiping God and how they were living a life turned away from God...

Also at this time, the Israelites believed that God was a part of all of creation, that God was able to bring both destruction and goodness, because God was an active force in and through their neighbors and in nature.

Think if you will of the prophet Jonah... Where God creates a storm so that Jonah can be swallowed by a fish, so that Jonah can be spit up and re-routed to where God originally asked Jonah to go...

As this encapsulates the Israelites view of God... God as an ever-present, ever-active part of life and the world.

Therefore, the clay that God is referring to in Jeremiah, is not one single individual, but the entire community and all of creation as a whole.

Which actually makes sense for how we view life today...

Because everything we do has an impact on something or someone else...

Nothing happens in a vacuum. And as we know from life, we are always impacted by forces outside of our control.

As there are so many variables in the world. Things that happen on a microscopic level and things that we cannot even comprehend...

A world where God is alive and in the midst of all the chaos, beauty, and mystery.

As God's hands are working in and with the clay of creation.

Because God wants to make the best vessels possible...

And God shows this truth to us through the body of Christ.

For God desires goodness, grace, mercy, and love to be a part of everything...

But for God to allow creation to unfold with freedom, God also needs to work with the materials that are available... And sometimes what is in the mix is not so pleasant, good, or loving.

But there is good news even in this...

God always works with what is available.

So perhaps our fire and brimstone words in Jeremiah does not really mean that evil is actively being plotted against us...

Rather, God is unveiling that because of how life is, there will always be negative forces, disaster, heartache, and hard times in our midst.

And so, God is asking, will you turn to the negative forces?

Or will you turn to God???

Trusting that God is working in and through creation to make all things new where meaning and love spills out through God's creation.

Afterall, God is the ultimate meaning maker...

And God finds meaning in you.

Which we know to be true, because God constantly desires to be in relationship with you.

A relationship as intimate as potter and clay...

A relationship where transformation is constant.

Taking place through God's loving touch or maybe even God's forceful nudge.

As God is embracing all the factors of life, positive, negative, and everything in between, to create the most beautiful and best outcome possible...

Until the day we can be embraced by God in Paradise.

But until then, we are constantly invited to turn to God.

Allowing God to transform you...

Turning to God even when life is too much to handle...

As we heard in our blessing prayer... We grow and we hurt and we heal, and then we will do it all over again. Because this beautiful paradox, is what it means to be human.

A paradox that God is an ever-present part of, because God finds meaning in you... Amen.