

Reflection: June 19, 2022

Jeremiah 18:1-6, Ephesians 3:16-21

Pottery can be so beautiful ... and it takes so many shapes and forms. But it doesn't start out that way. The beauty is fashioned from a lump of clay, in the hands of the potter.

In one of the readings we heard earlier, the prophet Jeremiah goes to the potter's house and there he learns a lesson about life. Watching the potter spin the lump of clay on the wheel, watching how his hands shape and mold the clay into a vessel – a bowl, a vase, a cup He is reminded of how God shapes our lives and fashions us into the people he desires us to be.

But he also notices that sometimes the clay becomes misshapen; or has a flaw. And though the potter could just throw the whole lump of clay into a corner, and start with new clay, he does not. He flattens the clay once more, and begins again, reworking it with his hands, spinning it on the wheel, until he achieves the result he desires. And so it is with us. Sometimes we fall short of what God hopes we will be or do. But God never gives up on us.

He continues to re-work or re-shape us into vessels that he can be proud of ... God never gives up molding our lives as He sees fit. When there are impurities in our lives, when we lose our way, He reshapes and remolds us for a greater good. He loves us and He wants us to grow towards perfection; God's desire is to bring out the best in us.

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Perhaps some of us have a problem with this image of the potter and the clay – maybe we think, “I don't need anyone molding me ... I'm smart – I'll do it my way. I can figure out things for myself!”

But think about this ... If we're not being molded by God, what or who are we being molded by? Are we being molded by our own thought processes, or are we being shaped by the opinions of others? Are we being formed by our culture – by the trends, whatever is popular? We're all being shaped by something. What is it?

For those of us who are part of a community of faith, who gather regularly for worship, I expect there's at least some part of us that wants to be formed by God or we wouldn't be here. We could stay home to sleep in, to rest after a busy week, to go shopping or biking ... But we're here! We want something beyond ourselves to shape us. We don't want to follow our own way.

Of course, there *are many* things in life that shape and influence us, and either help or prevent us from becoming the best that we can be. We are shaped by our family upbringing, by our society and social influences, by our station in life, and by our attitudes. Some of these things that shape us are beyond our control, but one thing we *can* control is the attitude we bring to all of life.

Those of us who seek God and allow God to live in us and direct our lives are more likely to be those who approach life with a sense of gratitude and with an outpouring of

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love for others.

The story is told of Jerry – who was the manager of a very successful restaurant in a large city. He was always in a good mood and always had something positive to say.

When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, “If I were any better, I would be twins!”

Many of the waiters at his restaurant had quit their jobs in other places, just to work for him; and it was all because of Jerry’s attitude. He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, Jerry was always there, helping the employee to look on the positive side of the situation.

One day someone went up to Jerry and said to him, “I don’t get it! No one can be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?” Jerry replied, “Each morning I wake up and say to myself, I have two choices today. I can choose to be in a good mood or I can choose to be in a bad mood. I always choose to be in a good mood. Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or I can choose to learn from it. I always choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or I can point out the positive side of life. I always choose the positive side of life.”

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“But it’s not always that easy,” the other protested. “Yes, it is,” Jerry said. “Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people will affect your mood. You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood. You choose to be totally self-absorbed or to look out for others. It’s your choice how you live your life.”

It’s like the story of 88 year old Agnes, who with bad legs and diminished eyesight, was no longer able to live on her own.

Her son drove her to the nursing home and upon entering, she smiled sweetly when she was told that her room was ready. As she maneuvered her walker down the hall, the nurse provided a brief description of her tiny room, including the small closet, the blue wing chair, and the eyelet comforter that covered her bed.

“I love it,” she stated with the enthusiasm of a seven year old having just been presented with a new puppy.

The nurse replied: “But Agnes, you haven’t even seen the room ... just wait.”

“That doesn’t have anything to do with it,” the 88 year old replied. “Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn’t depend on how the furniture is arranged It’s how I arrange my mind. I already decided to love it. It’s a decision I make

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every morning when I wake up. I have a choice. I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work, or get out of bed and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes open I'll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away ... just for this time in my life."

Today we are reminded that God is the potter of each of our lives and we are clay in God's loving hands. Through all the ages and stages of life, he continues to mold and shape us, and calls us to trust that in all things he is working for our good. Of course, there will be times when we struggle or feel overwhelmed by the circumstances of life, but perhaps we need to remind ourselves that these struggles often serve a purpose in making us stronger and wiser, and help us to grow into that image that God has for each of His children.

Seek God at all times, and he will draw near. Knock and he will open doors. Trust in the abundance of his love and grace for you. And know that He has placed in all our hearts the ability to be thankful in all things, as well as enough love to share, so that those around us are blessed by our presence and by Christ's love shining through us.

Let's sing together the hymn, Jesus Loves Even Me, as printed on the screen.