

Becoming human- giving glory. 26 August_2018.

(PP1) Becoming human- giving glory x 34 Sunday 26 August_2018.

Background text READ **Jeremiah 18: 1 – 11 God the Potter and Human Clay.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WCrlXbkX90>

This year we are exploring what it means to be truly, fully human.

Last time I spoke at the beginning of August I said that; ***In the process of following Jesus and becoming more like him there are 5 dimensions of changing relationship. Changing in relation to God, to neighbour, to myself, to creation environment and to time.*** Thanks to Bruce Milne's helpful idea on dimension in relationship.

As we seek individually and together in community to become more human we will bring greater glory to God by the way we live our lives in relationship to these 5 dimensions. It's a circle – because as we seek to give greater glory to God we will also become more fully human.

Today we are focussing on the dimension of our relationship as humans to our creator God. We will use the metaphor of people being like clay and God holding us and shaping us as a Potter shapes a vessel. (Metaphors and other devices e.g. Parables are used throughout the Bible to illustrate truths about God and God's relationship with people. Other metaphors: Shepherd and sheep; Father and child; God the Refiner).

Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust – is a powerful moment in the funeral service when all taking part are reminded that our material bodies are returned to the earth from which we are made. In *Genesis 2: 7* the Bible tells us that God created humanity from the same elements that the planet is made of. But of course, it also tells us that humans are more than material elements: God breathed life giving breath into us and we as humans made in the image of God are given life by God. So, at the funeral service we say not just *earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust* but also we say *in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection*.

We are human – of the earth but also made in God's image. Paul takes up this idea in the NT when he says to the Corinthians (*2C4:7*) that we are simply **clay pots** – we are ordinary vessels BUT those who follow Jesus have treasure within. We are mortal and fragile, but the power of God is within.

GOD THE POTTER AND THE HUMAN CLAY:

Two OT Prophets who used the metaphor were first Isaiah and then Jeremiah.

Isaiah himself said to God: *We are like clay, and you are like the potter. (64:8)* Isaiah is also heard to make the point that if God is our Maker – what is more important the potter or the clay? Also, the voice of God declares *“Does a clay pot dare to argue with its maker, a pot that is like all the others? Does the clay ask the potter what he is doing? Does the pot complain that its maker has no skill? (29:15)* In this passage God is heard to declare that he determines human history, and the planets and also the relationships and power of the nations. (*45: 9 fol*)

Jeremiah in **the clip we saw** illustrated from the prophet *Jeremiah 18: 1 – 11* instructs Jeremiah to go and contemplate the work of the potter and from this he speaks to Jeremiah about the whole House of Israel – the community of God's People – a nation and not just an individual. I have no doubt that the points God is making can be applied in this case to an individual's relationship with the Potter but its important to note that God's immediate application is to the idolatrous and disobedient people of Israel that God intends to take and re-shape into a vessel of his choice and usefulness. At that moment Israel was uncooperative with God.

(Jeremiah lived in the latter part of the 7th century and first part of 6th century BC. He was a sensitive and caring man with a tough message to deliver to a stubborn and idolatrous people who at times treated him appallingly. In the end saw Jerusalem fall to the Babylonians and King Nebuchadnezzar, people taken into exile, but he did foretell their eventual return. He foretold a time when God's Law would be written on their hearts Jer 31: 31-34).

God used a visual metaphor to show Jeremiah a revelation as to what was happening in the nation and to reveal something about God's nature. This is a metaphor that it is worth us relishing and also spending time contemplating and visualizing. **How do people and nations feel about being held in God's hands? Are we prepared to let God in his wisdom and love have control of our individual lives? As individuals I suggest we do try to take control and switch our role from being the clay to be the potter?**

Perhaps I should say that no one biblical metaphor sums up the full relationship of God with humanity which is why we have many biblical metaphors. The metaphor of the Potter and clay may seem a comparatively passive role of humans co-operating with a process, but we also have metaphors like the Lover and Beloved where there is much more engagement. BUT the metaphor of God the Potter and us the clay in God's hands does make us **ask whether we are prepared to allow God to choose what sort of vessel he wants to design and make and for us to be willing to have God work intimately on my inner life and also my outer life and expression of character in actions.**

<https://godthepotter.com/>

As Jeremiah watched the Potter at work he would have seen as we heard described an imperfect piece of clay being kept and reworked. What Jeremiah would have seen was the clay lump being:-

Wedged: like kneading dough – to make the clay elastic and free of any air bubbles which could explode in the kiln.

Centering the clay on the wheel and applying water and hand pressure to begin to mould the clay. If the pot is not centered it will not be as beautiful or as useful as it can be.

Opening the vessel – applying hand pressure to open the inner cavity to make it into a vessel – perhaps a vase, a jug or whatever the potter wants. Constant corrections are made and if a flaw appears then the process begins again.

Drying – the vessel is left to superficially dry out – too wet and it will explode in the kiln and destroy other vessels.

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First firing (bisque) – for 8 hours at over a 1,900 degrees Fahrenheit. This firing burns off many impurities from the vessel.

Decorate, colour, “make unique” the vessel with various glazes and then

Fire at least once more for (soda firing) over 14 hours and at over 2,300 degrees Fahrenheit. This makes the vessel not just beautiful but the glass coating makes it water tight and usable.

Each part of the process has significance and can easily be applied to how God works lovingly and persistently with us as human clay. How? By using circumstances and relationships to wedge us, prepare us for future events and so on. For example, the firing under great heat is used by James (1:2-4) to argue that various trials and difficulties refine us of impurities in our motives and values. Centering in life is absolutely vital to experiencing peace in our lives – for us the centering is upon Jesus. Even the drying time can describe perhaps times of boredom or simply waiting for God or something to happen...

I want to be the Potter not the clay – I want to be in control and determine my design. Or perhaps we even find it difficult to be this close to us - ???

If I asked you to go away and meditate upon this metaphor and visualize being held in God’s hands what would happen inside you? What would Jesus say? (Retreat exercise)

In Romans 9: 20 and 21 Paul reminds the Christians in Rome that the Potter has the right and creative power to shape the vessel for his purposes. The potter decides whether we are to be used as **a vase, a jug or even a toilet** (modern toilets are fired from clay that has fewer contaminants). When Paul writes to Timothy (2 Tim 2: 20) he reminds him that in a house intended to offer hospitality many kinds of vessels are needed.

The process that the Potter and Clay have to go through is the same whether we are being made into a vase, a jug or a toilet. At the hand of the Potter there will be wedging, wetting, centering, opening and shaping, drying, firing under intense heat, decorating and repeated firings the more complicated the pattern and design.

The clay will fully participate in this. The big question is will we ask the Potter to continue and will we cooperate and respond to what the Potter is saying and doing, or will we take back control.

Janet made the point when she spoke last week that some people will find it very difficult to accept and believe that God will welcome them, work with them and not reject them. They feel that God may throw them away as useless clay. NO – that is not what the metaphor of the Potter and the clay teaches us. However, damaged we are and however insignificant we feel God will redeem us and not reject us. He values me, he values you and has plan and purpose for you.

God will use all of our experiences of life to shape our character. God will refine our attitudes and challenge our values to make us more human, more like our Lord Jesus. I finish here and let the metaphor speak and open us up to God. Go and watch the Potter at work and contemplate his work on and in your life. For God’s greater glory!