

## Being Reshaped on the Potter's Wheel

Isaiah 64:8, Jeremiah 18:1-6

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*Yet you, God, are our Parent. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.*

*Isaiah 64:8*

*God told Jeremiah, "Up on your feet! Go to the potter's house. When you get there, I'll tell you what I have to say."*

*So I went to the potter's house, and sure enough, the potter was there, working away at his wheel. Whenever the pot the potter was working on turned out badly, as sometimes happens when you are working with clay, the potter would simply start over and use the same clay to make another pot.*

*Then God's Message came to me: "Can't I do just as this potter does, people of Israel?" God's Decree! "Watch this potter. In the same way that this potter works his clay, I work on you, people of Israel."*

*Jeremiah 18:1-6 The Message*

When I was in high school, I remember taking my first ceramics class. That was the first time I ever sat at a potter's wheel and learned about throwing a pot.

The hardest part of turning a pot is learning how to center the clay. I'd add some slip which is very watery clay and put some pressure on and then.... Thump, thump, thump ... like a unbalanced load of laundry in the spin cycle of the washing machine. The clay was very wobbly on the wheel.

It was so frustrating that on the first couple pots, I tried to turn them without fully centering the clay. I'd just give up and say, "Oh that's close enough."

But you know what? Un-centered clay makes lousy pottery. The longer the wheel turns and the faster un-centered clay is turned, the worse it gets. If you don't fully center the lump of clay, the rest of the process is a disaster. You end up with something that does not last and is not useful. I did finally persevere. With much patience and help from my teacher, I throw some useful pots.

Our Jeremiah passage is about getting another chance to change, to get it right. It's about the potter who realizes that the work in his hands has gone wrong, but, rather than throw out the clay, he gives it a new start and makes something useful and beautiful out of the redeemed lump.

" Can't I do just as this potter does, people of Israel?" says the Holy One.

At the wheel the potter exercises great attention to get it just right and a willingness to start over whenever he needed to do so.

The prophet Jeremiah would have appreciated watching the potter. He was struggling every day. His prayer life wasn't yielding many answers. There were a lot of bad things happening in his region of Judah, the southern kingdom. God was telling him to warn the people to change their ways and no one seemed to be listening. Even Jeremiah was not so sure he understood what God was saying.

So what did God do? God said, "Jeremiah, you aren't hearing what I am trying to tell you. Go down to the potter's house. I've got something to show you."

Jeremiah went down to where the potter was working, pulled up a stool and sat there, and waited for God to speak to him again. And there with Jeremiah staring at the potter's wheel, God spoke. Not in a booming or a still, small voice, not through a burning bush, but through a potter's hands on a pile of wet clay God spoke.

Something went wrong with the pot in the potter's hands and so the potter began to rework that clay into another vessel. Jeremiah got the message. God said, "I can do with people what the potter does with the clay. I can put my divine hands of love on anyone and everyone and shape every one of you into people of love and hope and peace. I can rework you as many times as it takes to shape you."

I am grateful for the ways the Holy One centers us, shapes us, and reshapes us. I have been shaped by the lesbian, gay and transgender people in my life, my family, my colleagues, friends, and people in the congregations I have served.

As a high school student our youth group visited West Hollywood Presbyterian Church in the early 1980's where Chris Glaser was on staff. He is a gifted gay Christian leader, writer and scholar. He was leading ministries and programs to the gay community in West Hollywood when most churches boldly rejected anyone who was gay or rumored to be. He talked with our group of young people about his spiritual journey. He invited us to consider that statistically there were members of our youth group who eventually would come out. He was right. He opened my eyes at an early age – not us and them – but friends, church family, people I loved, made in the image of God. John, Sam, Dave, Jeff, Krista, Carl. I lament that Chris, called by God to serve the church, was denied ordination. He continues to write and lead and be a passionate voice for LGBTQ folks inside and outside the Christian household. Through Chris, God reshaped me and taught me to be open to those close to me and to love all of who they are.

God is reshaping us. Who were the people who helped you catch a larger vision of sexuality and gender and faith?

I think about being in seminary and classmates who were afraid to come out because they felt it would be the end of the road for ordination in the Presbyterian Church. I remember classmates who were out and hopeful there would be a change in polity and a place for them to use their gifts and skills. Lisa Larges was one of my classmates. She is one of the best preachers I know. She has incredible spiritual depth, is a wordsmith, she loves God and the church, her humor slays me. And she is blind and she is lesbian. After many denials, she eventually served alongside Janie Spahr in a national ministry called That All May Freely Serve. Three years ago Lisa was finally ordained by the Presbytery of Minneapolis to serve as the Associate Pastor of Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church. Through Lisa, God reshaped me taught me perseverance and courage and standing with.

God is reshaping us when leaders emerge who challenge us. I regret not being a better ally for her and so many. Who helped you catch a new glimpse of leaders – pastors, elders, deacons in the church – who were LGBTQ and were denied? How did you respond? How has your mind changed?

I am grateful that FPCSR is a church that is a More Light Congregation and welcomes all people. That decision came out of a process of seeing differently, experiencing compassion and taking action and knowing pastors like Janie Spahr.

In this liminal season of the virus and protests, we can celebrate that we are part of a Christian tradition – Presbyterian – that came out of the Reformation – a time of being reformed, of new understandings of God and the church and the Bible, a time of protesting theologies and practices that did not ring true, that limited people's experience of God's grace. We are in a time of transformation.

Whenever you work with clay on a pottery wheel, you need water, water to add to the clay to make the slip so you can shape the clay. Water – the prophet Amos reminds us - let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Water - the waters of baptism renew us as we seek to follow the ways of Jesus.

May the Holy One continue to reshape us on the potter's wheel to be vessels of love and liberation. Amen.