

In line with our reading from Jeremiah, when I was a High School Senior I worked after school for a Ceramics Studio cleaning Pottery Wheels, loading Kilns, reconstituting Clay. There is a long connection between Potter's Clay and the Bible.

The prophet is not told to prophecy or teach, to purchase a vase, or to apprentice, but to Observe. We go places for a purpose. We drive to Continental Plaza for Dry Cleaners, to LaCanada for Walgreens, to Duval Maine for Culvers, to Tubac to purchase Artwork. We send emails or write letters to give information. We read books or watch television to be entertained. But Jeremiah is told simply to observe.

Recall that in the beginning God molded and created humanity out of the dust of the earth, quite literally the Greek word for "Dust of the Earth" is Humus, so the Human is molded out of the Humus.

In the Old Testament language of Hebrew, earth/dirt/creation is called ADAMA and rather than a proper name the Creature of Creation, the earthling formed from the earth, the muddling out of the mud, was called ADAM of ADAMA.

Different from all of the Creations of Genesis, where God commanded light separate from darkness, commanded the waters to recede and dry land to appear, the creation of plants and fish and birds and mammals all by a spoken word; God is said to have formed ADAM with God's own hands, to have molded and shaped our form; THEN God breathed God's own breath into the clay creature giving us life in God's own image with a freedom of Will.

Scholars have created all manner of different translations, resources and theories for reading the Bible, Concordances, Theological Dictionaries, but none have ever been able to name what it is to be CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE. Personally, I believe it was not that God had a Long Grey Beard, but that different from all other creations we have within us: GOD'S OWN BREATH, giving life. The Word for Breath also can be translated as Wind or Spirit. With God's own spirit giving us life, what it means to be in God's Image, is that like God, we each have a Freedom of Will. And the Ancient Hebrews believed that when we die, rather than a physical place of Heaven and Hell, that our Spirit our Breath returns to be One with God.

In COVID times, we practiced a variety of ways of Passing Christ's Peace. Some avoid hands all together and touch elbows. Some Fist-bump. Some High Five. Many of us longed throughout those many months for the time when we once again could be embraced and hug. In early Roman Christianity there was responsibility for a Witness to sit beside persons when dying. The origin of the Christian Kiss to Pass the Peace of Christ, came from kissing the dying on the mouth so as to take in their final breath.

In the first Congregation I served as Pastor, I brought a Potter's Wheel on to the Chancel to demonstrate and threw a Pot during the Sermon. However, I wound up with Clay and Water all over, and wearing a White Robe with carpeted floor, that is really impractical... But I love the image of God getting Messy working with Creation.

There are two vital first steps before the potter ever begins to throw a pot, first the potter kneads and works the clay. In working the clay like bread dough, instead of putting air into the dough, the potter works out all trapped air bubbles and imperfections in the mass. Stretching and making certain everything is ready, like Choir Members warming up our voices before worship. SECOND, the Potter Center's the Clay on the Wheel, this is not a mathematical calculation, the potter seats the clay where they imagine center to be, then as the wheel rotates, their hands push against the clay until the clay finds center by resistance. Modern wheels are electric with motors, but the traditional way, was for the potter to kick a hidden wheel down below similar to riding a bicycle, which drives an axel that rotates the wheel where the potter works the clay. I love this technology as explanation that we live and work on this plane of reality, but underneath

there is another spiritual wheel keeping everything in motion, allowing the world to spin without our even knowing.

Jeremiah observes that even when the Clay is spoilt and refuses to obey the Potter's touch, the Potter does not give up, or throw the clay away.

There is an odd nature to clay, that if worked too much, when clay has absorbed too much water it loses all strength. On the other hand, if the clay is not worked daily and cared for it becomes hard and brittle. Here is the miraculous part, all the hard, brittle stuff that was unworkable we put into garbage cans of water and gave it time. Over time, this primordial soup softens what was dried out into a liquid, that is poured into plaster molds and allowed to cure. The potter takes even clay pots that were broken or ruined in the kiln, bisque wear, hard a decayed bone and grinds this into a grit as fine as flour. Once the muck has reformed into a solid, the potter reworks the clay, using the gritty powder to provide substance and absorb moisture, the potter then kneads the clay to a consistent smooth elastic substance.

One of the regular critiques of the Presbyterian Church is that John Calvin believed in Predestination. The fact of the matter is that in the 1500s Everyone Believed in Predestination. Prior to the Enlightenment people did not have the ability to REASON. More than having a greater level of Faith, or there being less Evil in the world, with the ability to Reason we have developed the ability to justify why we do our actions.

But Predestination is not Predetermination. Predetermination would mean that God was like a Cosmic Clockmaker, fixing every decision of life, already worked out and resolved according to God's plan, before we were ever created! No, created in God's Image we have a Freedom of Will to choose every decision of life for ourselves..

Historically, we have described belief in Original Sin. The fact of the matter according to Genesis 1 ORIGINALLY God formed everything in all Creation, including you and I, and God called it "VERY GOOD" and God Blessed Us; so rather than Original Sin, the Bible proclaims we had ORIGINAL BLESSING!

However, as human creatures with a Freedom of Will, demonstrated with Adam and Eve, and again with Cain killing Abel, we regularly choose wrong, choosing selfishly. We have Predestined ourselves to sin! Yet, God loves us so much, even as sinners, that God offers us Grace/Forgiveness/even the life of a Savior; where some of us will come to a time of recognition and turn our lives around and some will not.

Similar to the two parts of centering the clay, there are two elements of human nature that have always fascinated me,

FIRST, that none of us can fully know and understand the sins another person is struggling with, or if they are forgiven, yet we love to knead them and work them over, judging one another.

SECOND, that some of us hear the words of Jeremiah, and what we hear is condemnation, that:

IF GOD ANNOUNCES THAT ANY NATION OR KINGDOM IS TO BE BUILT UP OR PLANTED, AND IT DOES EVIL AND DOES NOT OBEY, THEN GOD WILL RECONSIDER THE GOOD INTENDED TO DO.

Where what I hear is Hope

IF AT ANYTIME GOD ANNOUNCES THAT ANY NATION OR KINGDOM IS TO BE UPROOTED, TORN DOWN AND DESTROYED, AND IF THOSE WARNED REPENT OF ITS EVIL, THEN GOD WILL RELENT AND NOT INFLICT THE DISASTER PLANNED.