

We Are God's World, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 16070909
Jeremiah18:1-11 and Philemon 1-21
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Our daughter signed up for a ceramics class in college and found she enjoyed it. She made many pieces of art including a set of coffee cups that we use in our home. Each cup is unique. To make them, the artist “throws” clay onto a wheel. The wheel spins around, and the artist can pinch, pull and mold the clay until it stands up and is formed. Each piece is lovingly and carefully shaped.

When the shape is not turning out as the artist has envisioned, it is re-thrown and reshaped. Then it is colored, glazed, and fired in a kiln: a very hot oven. The glaze takes on a uniqueness.

This hand-shaped pottery is different from machine-made pieces. A machine would make each piece similar, but each hand-made one is precious and unique— like people: precious and unique.

The Sixth Century Before Christ Prophet Jeremiah used the image of an artisan working at a wheel. He went down to the village potter's house one day, the house of the person who made the all-important vases, vessels, cups, and pitchers for the town. He noticed that when the shape was not quite right, the potter started over. Jeremiah had an inspiration. He saw in the potter's creative and loving hands, the hands of God. God lovingly created the nation Israel to be a servant nation, living God's laws, and blessing the nations around it. But, Israel was not turning out the way God had envisioned and created it. Instead, it was turning away from God. God, like the potter, would destroy the nation and start over. Jeremiah told the people that the impending disaster of destruction of the nation was caused by their refusal to listen to God's voice.

The people were putting their trust in institutions, rather than in God: institutions like the Ark of the Covenant, rites like circumcision and sacrifice, and in the temple itself. Jeremiah said the people were like well-fed stallions, each neighing for his neighbor's wife. They were showing no concern for the defenseless victims of society. Because nations did evil, God would simply smash down the vessel and start all over. The threatened catastrophe was to come not as a result of the capricious wrath of the potter, but as a result of human stubbornness.¹

Can Twenty-first Century America learn a lesson from Jeremiah and the Israel of two thousand six hundred years ago? I think so. We risk being smashed down and reshaped because we are not listening to God's voice.

To listen to God's voice is something far greater than what the Christian right complains about. School prayer is a smokescreen. Abortion is a side issue. And, if gays and lesbians were affirmed as God created them, Congressman Larry Craig would not have to be in such denial about himself.

The issues God cares about are the ways in which we treat the poor, the minorities, and the outsiders. Do we trust in military defenses or in God? Should we carry concealed weapons or exposed Bibles? Are we concerned with merely creating a favorable environment for business or with being compassionate with our profits and our taxes? Do we allow the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer, or announce that all people are reflections of God?

Like Israel many years ago, we must allow ourselves to be shaped by God's hands. We cannot tell God what to do. The clay never says to the potter, “Make me a little wider,”

¹Bernard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* 1st addition, p. 334

“Make me taller,” or
“I want to be more beautiful!”

God will make us into what God chooses, and we will be a blessing to the world whether we like it or not! We are part of a world community. We will be a part of that community, no matter how much we try to force our will on other nations or how much our xenophobes complain about the United Nations.

Each child is unique. The young people of our congregation will be shaped as they grow. Many hands will be involved: parents, friends, teachers, and church school teachers. Will we let God’s hands be involved with their shaping? Will we make sure that they feel the tender touch of the heavenly hands? Will their ears hear the words of Jesus to love neighbors and enemies?

God will make the world into what God wants it to be. With dizzying confusion, the world changes its shape around us. World events like Iraq, Iran, Somalia, and Darfur leave us dismayed. Perhaps they are God’s shaping the world in a new way. God will shape this world to serve God.

God will shape this church into what God wants it to be. The culture today is far different than the one that existed when I went to seminary. The church must find new ways to proclaim the gospel to a society that is largely godless, valueless, and spiritually hungry. We will be open to God’s shaping, or we will find ourselves outmoded out dated, and out of service.

God will make you and me into what God wants us to be. Each of us is unique. The Psalmist said,

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”²

As the potter formed the clay into a vessel, God has formed you into a vessel of the Holy Spirit.

How has the divine artisan shaped and molded you? What are your unique gifts and talents that the eternal potter wants to use to show love to the people around you? It is okay to allow God to shape us, really. It is. We are such control freaks. We want to be in charge of our lives. However, God will be gentle with us. It can be pleasurable, like being massaged. Imagine a divine massage. Even painful experiences can, through prayer and devotion, transform us into better people. God will make us divinely useful.

We praise God, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

²Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18