## Recently I visited someone who is in the recovery phase after multiple trips to the hospital in the past couple of years, due to various illnesses. Between follow up doctor’s visits and physical therapy sessions etc., her recovery seems like a never-ending or a constant “work in progress” with no end in sight. This whole ordeal has taken a toll on her not only physically, emotionally, but spiritually as well. She wonders why? Why is God putting me through all of these? I’m sure some of us can certainly relate this woman as well either ourselves or through someone we know. It is important that we acknowledge that God is still ultimately in control of our lives. Even though our bodies might be broken, but our spirits are not shattered.

## Sometimes our life might also appear like in a continual “Work in Progress” that requires periodic follow-up and constant monitoring. God continues to work alongside with us. When God breathed life into the creations of this earth, God never stop after the first 6 days. God simply took a sabbath, which literally means a “rest”. After God rested, God continued to create, renew, and sustain us in this world. God continues to mold us and shape us into the persons who God intended us to be.

## As we read earlier from the prophet Jeremiah, we are described as like the clay in the potter’s hand, as we take part of the on-going work and activities of our creator God. We become malleable to God’s creativity and imagination. On the other hand, if God so chooses, God can break it down, tear things apart, and start all over from scratch. We acknowledge God’s sovereignty in our lives and that God is God and we are not.

## God called upon the young prophet Jeremiah to deliver this stern warning to the people of Israel, pleading for them to turn back to God and acknowledge their sins. This came in a time when the Israelites were in exile. Some saw this as a sign of God’s judgement upon them. Others might see this as a sign of hope and deliverance, despite what they had done in abandoning and failing to honor the covenant established between God and the people.

## God sent the young prophet Jeremiah to the potter’s house in order to demonstrate his plan for the people. Out of a lump of clay, the potter makes a vessel behind the pottery wheel. But this was no ordinary clay. This clay was spoiled and made out of broken pieces of an old vessel. It was not perfect, there’s something wrong with it. Through the hands of the potter, these broken pieces were being refined and re-purposed into something useful once again. Everything was orchestrated precisely how the potter has drawn it up. At this point, the potter was behind the pottery wheel and had complete control of what he was about to do. The potter can “rework” it and form something totally new and different. It’s all up to his imagination. OR the potter could break it down and abandon it altogether.

## The metaphor of the broken vessel is kind of like the refurbished electronics that I had mentioned earlier, when something is not right and requires a repair to a problem. The customer must return it back to the factory, to have it all checked out and be “refurbished” or “remanufactured”. It’s about restoring new life out of something that might seem hopeless and lifeless. This has been an on-going theme throughout the Old Testament, bringing new life out of nothing and lifeless situation and chaos, like the dry bones and the chaotic seas.

## On the other hand, sometimes it might not be worth fixing…the cost outweighs the benefits. So at that point, the potter may have to totally surrender and abandon its plan and start from scratch.

## Furthermore, God used this analogy of the potter, the broken vessel, and the clay to describe our relationship with our Creator, who would mold us and shape us into what we are purposed to be. Each one of us are uniquely different and specially created in that sense. None of us are exact identical to others.

Our God is into the “make-over” business. As reluctant as it may be, he’s willing to crush everything that he had created and begin from scratch once again. In the *New Living Translation* of Jeremiah 18:4 is translated as,***“But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so the potter squashed the jar into a lump of clay and started again.”*** He is willing to give his creation a 2nd chance, a new life and a new beginning.

## Imagine what kind of response Jeremiah might have received when the Israelites heard his prophecy and kept their hearts stubborn and hardened like stones, reluctant to be softened and remolded by the potter. Often times we might feel like a lump of clay, not knowing what was going on, what we have become, and have lost our sense of purpose and meaning? We’ve become a lump of clay, shapeless, formless, disorganized, yet at the complete disposal and mercy of the potter – our Creator. The potter is willing to break us apart, refurbish and rework it from scratch, turning something that is worthless into something that is precious and purposeful in God’s sight.

## When the people sinned, it broke God’s hearts also. Reluctantly God sent judgement upon the people not to punish them but to show them that there was a way out…because He loved them. God offered them an opportunity to repent and to be redeemed.

## As the book of Ecclesiastes reminded us that, for everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up.[[1]](#footnote-1)

When I was in junior high over at Shell Bank, I took the ceramic shop class one semester. I learned how to make these ceramic plates, cups and vases from scratch. It’s kind of like baking. I remember we must follow the precise ingredients and proportions of the various elements, otherwise the clay will not come out the way it’s supposed to, either it will be too soft or too hard. Or it will simply crack when it’s put into the oven.

Little did I know that I was already learning an important life lesson from my Junior High ceramic class…that we must be patient and obedient in following instructions and with the right amount of ingredients, or else it simply will not work. And if it fails to come out right, don’t be afraid to try again until we get it right the next time or the next. Perseverance and faithfulness matter! That’s the biggest takeaway from my ceramic class. If you don’t succeed, try again and again, until you do. God always stands ready to give us another chance, if we’ve acknowledged what we’ve done wrong.

## Like an athlete would spend years and years of training for the competition, not all of them are going to win a medal when they compete. They might have taken hundreds of falls with various setbacks and injuries, but every time they fall, they must pick themselves back up and finish what they have started. They might have fallen or broken but their dreams are not shattered. The question is, not so much of what God can do, but what we are willing to do ourselves. Are we willing to let God break us down and “re-work” us from within into another vessel…something as beautiful and as good as God sees fit.[[2]](#footnote-2) Are we willing to be refurbished by God if something is not right?

## As we read in our Call to Worship earlier taken from Psalm 139, the Psalmist painted us this beautiful imagery of our intimate relationship with God, declaring that God has searched us and known us, both inside and out. God knows our every inner thought when we are sitting down and when we are rising up. God knows our very words (both spoken and unspoken) and what’s on our mind, whether they’re intended for good or for evil. God has intricately knitted us together in our mothers’ wombs, like the Potter who must spent time with His clay in order to make the “perfect” vessel.

Undoubtedly, working with clay can be messy. Well, so is carrying out God’s work in ministry. It too can get very messy at times in dealing with various personalities and stubborn hearts that requires much patience, perseverance and even personal sacrifice. At times, we might feel like asking God to break us down and start from scratch once again.

Like the potter behind the pottery wheel, we must be willing to invest our creativity and imagination in order to make things work. Not according to what we want, but what God wants. As Presbyterians, we believe that we are *“reformed and always reforming, according to the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit.”* Our lives are nothing but a constantly “work in progress”.

Transformation is still happening even if it may not be visible before our eyes or audible to our ears. But know that God’s seeds have been sown upon the preaching and the hearing of God’s word. As God continues to transform us, mold us, and shape us into what we are called to be, may we radiate God’s handiwork in us and reflect upon God’s glory to those around us.

In the same way, we too have been called to be the potters who would help refurbish someone’s brokenness and to guide them to new life through the grace of God. God has empowered and emboldened us to be shapers and molders of people.[[3]](#footnote-3)  **We ARE the modern day prophets of God’s message of hope and love in this world.** As Mother Teresa once said, ***“We are only a little pencil in the hand of a writing God, who is sending a love letter to the world.”*** In other words, we are simply vessels and ambassadors of God’s love to this world…a world that is in constant need of mending, repair, and renewal each day, as we restore hope and peace into this broken world that we live in.

In closing, I would like to share with you this poem entitled the *The Potter’s Wheel*, by Marilyn Ferguson (2005)

**The Potter's Wheel**

**When you're troubled and discouraged**

**In the darkness of the night**

**When obstruction clouds your vision**

**And you just can't see the light.**

**When life's trials overcome you**

**And you have nowhere to turn**

**When you've reached the very bottom**

**There are lessons you must learn.**

**For the clay is being molded**

**It's been twisted, pulled and tossed**

**It's been rolled and it's been pounded**

**Till the ego has been lost.**

**He will put you through the furnace**

**You'll be tested to the brim**

**Your life will be in pieces**

**Till you give your soul to Him.**

**From blemish to perfection**

**His hands will form the clay**

**This human piece of rubble**

**Must let God have His way.**

**When you come to Him all battered**

**In the form of mortal man**

**When you cry to Him in mercy**

**You will find the Potter's hand.**

**He will grind you, mold and chisel**

**The friction you will feel**

**Till He gently carves and shapes you**

**Upon the Potter's wheel.**

1. *Ecclesiastes 3:1-3* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Jeremiah 18:4* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Utley Allie *Connections Year C, Volume 3* p.289 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)