

The Reverend Theo's Sermon for September 7, 2025
Jeremiah 18:1-11

“It's Okay to Change”

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Every three years, we come across this passage from Jeremiah. It has turned out to be one of my favorites because 12 years ago, it was the very first passage upon which I preached a sermon. At the time, I was given this task as a kind of a test to see if I was truly feeling the call of God to be priest. Jeremiah 18:1-11 happened to be one of the passages the week I was assigned. It took me 6 weeks and many hours in a library to write that sermon. Luckily, I've gotten a fair bit quicker now! Each time this passage has come up in the lectionary, I have been in a new parish, which is actually kind of incredible to think about. But it has meant that I've gotten many opportunities to review, rework, and revamp this nostalgic sermon. Hopefully you enjoy it as much as others have while also learning a bit about the path I've taken to get here.

Jeremiah was a prophet who didn't want to be a prophet – at least not in the beginning. He was only 12 when he received his calling. Like many other prophets in the Hebrew scriptures, Jeremiah denied his calling. Years following his first contact with God, he reluctantly accepted the fact that he was to be a prophet to the nations. In chapter 15, he says, “Your words were found and I ate them, and your word was to me for joy and for the gladness of my heart.” Jeremiah's life work was to deliver God's word and bring change to the house of Israel.

The book of Jeremiah is filled with stories of how he lived out his calling of receiving God's word and delivering the good news to the people of Israel. The story today begins with God sending Jeremiah to the potter's house in order to receive God's word.

Pottery is a collective term that is used to describe anything made from clay, heated at high temperatures, and chemically changed in order to form useful household items and beautiful pieces of art. It takes creativity, patience, and the willingness to destroy previous creations in order to achieve a masterpiece.

As Jeremiah watches the potter work, he realizes three things:

1. The potter working the clay is as God working with people
2. A spoiled vessel can be reworked, and
3. The house of Israel is as clay in the hands of the Divine Potter

My initial response to “God as the potter” was “Oh! That makes sense! God molds each of us into the person God intends us to be!” But it’s not that simple.

Instructions from God are not always straight-forward. There are no “do this” or “do that” statements with an “or else” consequence. Instead, lessons are sent to us through prophets such as Jeremiah, not simple directives. Rather than telling us what to do, or who to be, God guides us through stories of love, grace, and mercy.

We have heard some of these lessons over the last few weeks as we have been reading from the Book of Jeremiah. Over and over, Jeremiah spreads God’s word trying to find different ways of showing the Israelites how much better their lives could be if they would simply show a little kindness to one another. However, the people of Israel seem to be set in their ways and have no intentions of changing. They make the choice not to hear God’s word.

Well, maybe they heard, but they didn’t listen to the words Jeremiah was speaking. All God wants is for people to love one another, no matter if the person is male or female, black or white, rich or poor, healthy or sick. Not much to ask, I don’t think.

If you were to take Jeremiah’s stories literally, it sounds as if God has made the decision to start all over – that God will “pluck up and break down and destroy”. But I don’t think that’s actually the case...

To rework clay, a potter would just smash his hand on the clay and start over. Instead of simply laying a Divine Hand on the clay and starting over, God gives the people a chance to change – God sends more and more lessons to the Israelites. Rather than destroying all of creation, God continues to spread love, to guide us, and to encourage us to love others. God is choosing to gently mold us lesson by lesson, rather than destroying and rebuilding.

The story of Jeremiah at the potter’s house has always struck a chord with me as I feel that it is a reflection of my story. I spent almost my entire life swinging from all-

out believer to apparent atheist and back again. As a kid, I only went to church to be with my Grandma but once I was there, I loved the stories and the music.

In my teens years I got too busy for church plus no one I knew believed in God, so I decided I didn't either. However, there were still times when I went to church – usually during occasions of sorrow, or confusion. I never could explain my need to go to church, and it certainly didn't make me go on a regular basis. But for brief, inexplicable moments, I found peace. I remember at my first Air Cadet summer camp, finding myself feeling homesick. There was a call one Sunday morning for churchgoers to gather for service. I found myself joining them, without completely understanding why.

Then almost 17 years ago, everything changed. My oldest child was born. Suddenly, it was very important to me that they be baptized and raised in a church. During the Baptismal interview, my newly-found minister asked me one very important question – why do I want El to be baptized? I couldn't answer that question right away – I just knew it was something I had to do, something my heart was telling me to do.

So the two of us started attending church. My home church had a laid-back evening service on Mondays that were based more on musical reflection than worship, so I started with those services. I was very hesitant in the beginning, unsure of my beliefs and my reasons for being there. I didn't even take part in communion the first few times we came.

My personal turning point came on Maundy Thursday during the Easter season following El's baptism. At the last moment, I was asked to read the following passage from Corinthians:

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” (1 Cor 11:23-26)

When I was asked to read the passage, I had no idea those were the words that were on the page. I hadn't read a bible in years so, in my head, they came as a surprise. I think I hesitated somewhere around "this is my body". The realization of the words I was about to speak struck me speechless. The institution of the Last Supper is such an important part of Jesus' story; I was humbled and honoured to be speaking these words aloud. In my head, these words should have only been spoken by priests.

Suddenly, I felt something on my shoulder. I looked over but of course there was no one there. It was a very powerful moment – I knew in my heart God was telling me it was okay to go on, to finish reading the Prayer. That's when I really started listening to the readings, to the songs, to the prayers.

I learned the Lord's Prayer as a child – said it in school, said it at the dinner table – but I never really listened to the words. Same with all the music. Most of it was the same as when I was little, but only at this point did I really start to understand the meaning of the words behind the music. As I started really hearing the words, I finally understood what God had been trying to say to me all these years – that God is here, that God wants to be a part of my life, and the God loves me. God's words are beautiful and have changed my life.

I finally stopped to listen and let God's hands guide me in the right direction. Looking back on my wavy path from believer to non-believer, back again, and now to being a priest, I've come to realize that the lesson I learned along the way was not only did God love me and accept me, but that it's also okay to change. It's more than okay – God encourages us to learn and to grow, and to be shaped by the lessons we find throughout scripture.

As easy as clay in a potter's hands, a person can be reshaped by turning their mind and heart to the Creator. By reading the word of God, praying to God, and listening to God, we can all be the clay in the hands of the Divine Potter.

Amen.