

Title: The Potter's House

Preaching: Randy Spleth, Senior Minister

Scripture: [Psalm 46](#)

Text: [Jeremiah 18:1-6](#)

E-mail: [Randy Spleth](#)

When was the last time you gave someone directions? When was the last time you asked for directions? Okay, I know some of you guys have never asked for directions. But that joke has become dated. Now we have smartphones or onboard navigation systems guide us. Personal GPS-equipped devices entered the mass market 15 or so years, and now, we rarely travel without them. They allow us to know exactly where we are going and where we are headed.

For all their benefits, they come with a price. They affect perception and judgment. When people are told which way to turn, it relieves them of the need to create their own routes and remember them. Less attention to your surroundings weakens the hippocampus; it can be detrimental to your overall ability to navigate in the world. In other words, GPS weakens your brain. It is why some neuroscientists are saying to turn them off. Finding our way on our own — using perception, empirical observation, and problem-solving skills — forces us to attune ourselves to the world. And by turning our attention to the physical landscape that sustains and connects us, we can nourish "topophilia," a sense of attachment and love for a place.¹

Our lesson today begins with a command. "Go down to the potter's house." (Jeremiah 18:1b) This command is given to the prophet Jeremiah. It was well before GPS. He had to find his own way there. Likely he not only knew exactly where the potter lived but he'd been there often. He may have developed topophilia for it, a sense of attachment if not love for the Potter's House.

Jeremiah began his ministry in Jerusalem in 627 BCE. He was from the northern kingdom of Israel but was commissioned to prophesy to the southern kingdom and the capital city of Jerusalem. He begins his ministry around the time that King Josiah instituted religious reforms. It was largely successful, but Josiah became distracted by a war with Egypt. He dies in battle in 609 and things in the southern kingdom and Jerusalem deteriorate quickly. Everyone sensed that if something didn't change, it would all fall apart. It eventually does when Nebuchadnezzar conquers Judah and Jerusalem in 597 BCE.

Before this takes place, Jeremiah has the unenviable task of prophesying about this pending destruction. He moves from his hometown of Anathoth to Jerusalem and spends the next two decades telling people to repent. It is a tough job which Jeremiah never wanted. But he is faithful to his call and out of his faithfulness, we have this wonderful story that begins, "Go down to the potter's house." We can assume that he knew where the potter's house was because he'd lived in Jerusalem long enough to know where the potter lived.

We can also assume that he'd been there before. Everyday pottery of a typical Judean household was practical, pieces used to hold grain and wine, nothing ornamental or spectacular about it. It was serviceable ware but not very durable. Judean pots had a short life span, given their poor construction out of equally poor materials. There was even a gate in Jerusalem called the Potsherd Gate, literally the Broken Pots gate, where all of the shards were thrown. It was a garbage dump. Thus, a trip to the local potter was both frequent and familiar. So when God says to Jeremiah "Rise up and go down to the potter's house, and there I will make you hear my words." (Jeremiah 18:2), Jeremiah knows the way.

He went down to the potter's house, and the potter was working at his wheel. This is a visual as well as an auditory word from God. Jeremiah knows that this isn't about a potter at a wheel working a piece of clay. The word that Jeremiah uses for "potter" is a cousin to the Hebrew verb, "yatsar" to form or fashion. This is the word found in Genesis when "...then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life..." (Genesis 2:7) This isn't just a potter. The one working the clay, the potter before the wheel is symbolic of the Creator, the Potter God, shaping each one of us on a divine potter's wheel.

Then Jeremiah says, "The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him." (Jeremiah 18:4)

Sometimes, maybe often, a potter makes a mistake. It isn't centered well on the wheel. The clay will thin out too quickly or he will put too much pressure with one thumb. He'll get distracted and his hand will slip. There will be too much or too little water. Starting over is a common experience by any potter using a wheel.

Then God says to Jeremiah: "Can I not do with you.... just as this potter has done? ...like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel." (Jeremiah 18:6-7) The answer, of course, is yes. It is implicit in the question and the reason for the visual experience that Jeremiah encounters.

It is why God sent the prophet to the potter's house, why the story was passed along for generation to generation, why we are studying it today.

Sometimes, faithful men and women fall into ruts. They live their lives in ways that they may think are faithful but are not. You can fool yourself into believing you are doing what God wants you to do, that you are living a good and faithful life, but when it comes right down to it, you aren't. This is the place where God's people find themselves. They were making bad choices and decisions while trying to convince themselves that they were good. They weren't fooling anyone, let alone God.

God's message to Jeremiah is this. "Tell them I formed you once, I can do it again. I can reshape you. I can mold you into something quite different." This isn't a new message. One hundred years earlier, God used the image of the potter with Isaiah. "We are the clay, and you are our potter. All of us are the work of your hand." (Isaiah 64:8.) God is a Potter, the Creator that can shape and mold you if you are open to this possibility. Unfortunately, God's people weren't willing. God says to Jeremiah tell them I'm the potter and can reshape them. "But they said, "What's the use! We will follow our own plans and act according to our own willful, evil hearts." (Jeremiah 18:11a, 12) The results were catastrophic. Judah and Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar.

God's Story is a story for nations and a story for individuals. It is about what happened and about what can happen. It is why there is truth in God's Word, not just in the past but eternal truth that speaks to today and tomorrow. I hope you claim these truths out of Jeremiah's story.

You need to know the way to the Potter's House. For Jeremiah it was easy. It was a familiar place, a place where he'd probably been often. His hippocampus was strong; he had topophilia. That's not necessarily the case today. Finding the Potter's House is harder and harder. There was once a time everyone knew where to find the Potter and knew the importance of entering His house. But many of the landmarks are gone and there are all sorts of voices that suggest that there are other ways and other paths. The result is many people become lost.

Have you had that experience yet with GPS where it has directed you to the wrong place? Or taken you on a route that was out of the way? I've had both. When GPS was just getting started, the GPS on our new car took us 80 miles out of the way when traveling to visit family in Oklahoma. Why? It didn't know the backroads. I knew we were going in the wrong way, but I didn't trust my memory; it had been too many years since I was there.

You can spend weeks, months even years walking in the wrong direction spiritually by not placing yourself in the Potter's House. There are plenty of voices in your life and our world which say a visit to the Potter's House is optional or even unnecessary. The very same voices in the 7th century BC said, "We will follow our plans" and the result was catastrophic. One of the reasons we come together in worship is orientation. We come to yield our lives to the Potter God, to have a clear sense of who we are and to whom we belong, to acknowledge that God is our refuge and strength, to be still and know God. We come to nourish "topophilia," a sense of attachment and love for a place.

We need to know the way to the Potter's House. This puts us in a position to claim the second truth. You are God's creation. **Know that God created you.** God shaped you. All of us are the work of God's hand." (Isaiah 64:8b) A potter will tell you that no two pots are the same. You can fool the eye, but the Potter's hands know that each is different. There is no way possible to throw identical pots.

So, it is when God approaches the Potter's wheel with human clay. Every one of us is unique. There is no one in the world exactly like you. There never has been and never will be. The computers that created GPS and tell you that you can search the world over, you will not find another with the same fingerprint as yours. The print of your voice is unique. The retina of your eye is different than another. Everyone here is different. Each of us is unique. What did God go through the trouble of creating you differently than anyone else? Because as far as God is concerned, every art piece the Potter God creates is a work of love.

Each of us has common experiences each day. One is looking into a mirror. Some of us spend a lot of time looking in a mirror. Others spend the least amount of time possible. Sometimes, you look in the mirror and think, "I'm looking okay today, pretty good actually." Other times you think, "I'm having a bad hair day or I'm looking old or I've got this big zit." Self-talk in front of a mirror never goes away. Here's an assignment.

The next time you are in front of the mirror, say, "I am a work of art created by the Potter God. I was created in love." I believe our spiritual self-esteem would be greatly improved if we did this. It would help us claim our relationship with God, give us joy, even keep us going through tough times.

Know the way to God's house. Know that God created you. Then, **live like clay in God's hand.** Trust God to shape you. The Potter God isn't done. God says, "Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand..." (Jeremiah 18:7b) Potter's have an expression. The Potter knows the clay better than anyone. In this context, God knows you better than you know

yourself. Living like clay in the Potter's hand says, "Okay, Potter God, I'm going to give my life to you. I'm going to allow you to stretch me, mold me, fill me and shape me for new things. I'm going to let this happen even if I can't imagine it.

This was Paul's understanding. Picking up on the image of our lives being created by the Potter God, he says, "...we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." (2 Corinthians 4:7) And what is the treasure? The treasure is the love of God in Jesus Christ. God so loved His art pieces, the human clay that God formed into men and women, that God sent Jesus to reshape and reform us, to make us more lovely and loveable.

No one is unusable or unredeemable. There is not Broken Pot Gate where we are cast off. The Potter God loves every creation and means to make each more than what it is today.

God said to Jeremiah. "Tell them I formed you once, I can do it again. I can reshape you. I can mold you into something quite different." Those were words for Judah 600 years before Jesus was born and they are words for us today. When we own them, claim them, life is different.

We have visited the potter's house today in Jeremiah just as you have you visited this Potter's House because worship shapes us. I hope it has sustained and connected with you so that you can nourish "topophilia," a sense of attachment and love not just for this place, but for the Potter God.

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ditch-the-gps-its-ruining-your-brain/2019/06/05/29a3170e-87af-11e9-98c1-e945ae5db8fb_story.html