

September 4, 2016
Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18
Jeremiah 18:1-11

Made and Re-made By God

A prophet's job is not easy. Because a prophet is bound to tell the truth.

In all times and places, it's the truth and nothing but the truth delivered

straight to God's people. A prophet has the terrible, difficult job of

telling God's people again and again that they are off track. That they

have gone astray. That they are unfaithful; worshiping false gods,

ignoring the Sabbath commandment, breaking their divine covenant.

Just being people instead of people of God. The truth is, Jeremiah says,

is that the people have to change. It's time to be God's people again.

Jeremiah reveals the terrible, difficult truth to Israel; and to us. That we

are off track, off course, off kilter as God's people. And we need to

remember who we are. But we also need to remember who God is and

what God can do. The truth is, Jeremiah says, is that God is like a potter

and we are like the clay. And that means three things. First of all, it

means God knows what we are made of. Second, it means God will keep

working on us and shaping us. And third, it means that we also have to

do some work on ourselves.

First, God knows what we are made of--because God made us. God created us from the ground up and knows us inside and out. As the Psalmist says, "God, you formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance." God knows us and knows what we are made of. And God knows what we can become. When I was young, I was in Girl Scouts and I remember I was so nervous about the first time we went camping overnight. My family was not a camping family. So I had no experience with tents or fires or sleeping bags or night noises. I knew there would be bugs. And there would be snakes. And there would be no place to go to the bathroom. It was worried and anxious about being outside all night with no walls or roof or doors. But our Scout leader kept telling me that I needed to come camping with them. "You can do this," she said. "You'll be fine," she said. Almost as if she knew I COULD do it. And I would be fine. As if she knew that deep down in my scared self, there was a brave girl who could do brave things. So because of her encouragement, I did it. And I survived. I survived the mosquitos. I survived the tent with the broken zipper. I survived the porta-potties and I survived all the little girl drama

that was my Scout troop. I survived and the bravery my troop leader saw in me became real.

There are some people who know what we can become. But more than any of those people, God knows us. God knows us inside and out. God knows what we are made of. And we might not look like much, but God knows we have it in us to do big things. We have it in us to be strong and brave. We have it in us to do good and to persevere for the sake of what is right even when everything else in the world is wrong. God made us to be God's people, to do more and be more. So what if God knew that about you? What if God believed in you? And had big expectations of you? And knew the stuff you were made of and that it was amazing and kingdom-worthy? What MORE could God be calling you to be now?

The people of Israel--God's people--God knew THEY could be more. God knew them inside and out. God knew what they were made of. God knew that they had it in them to survive the brutality of slavery in Egypt. They had it in them to endure 40 years in the wilderness. They had it in them to fight and work hard and establish themselves in the Promised

Land. True, this whole journey had not been easy. The people of God had it in them to complain A LOT. They had it in them to fuss and whine and bicker with God and with Moses and with one another. Oh, how God knew these people. Oh how God was acquainted with their ways. Oh how God remembered when God had brought the people up out of Egypt to Mt Sinai. And God was preparing the Ten Commandments for his new people at the top of the mountain. What were the people doing at the bottom of the mountain? They were not worshiping God. They were worshiping a golden calf. These people, difficult people; they had almost driven God crazy. But these people, they were God's people. They were God's beloved. And Jeremiah knew that. Jeremiah knew these people. And Jeremiah knew God's truth that these people had it in them to do more. To be more. To be God's difficult and peculiar people. Living God's peculiar way. Living carefully as caretakers of creation. Living without lying or stealing or coveting. Living a Sabbath life, making holy space for themselves and others. Loving their neighbors as themselves. Being a light to the world,

a city on the hill. These people of God could be better. They were made to do better.

Jeremiah reminds us, first of all, that God knows what we are made of.

And God keeps working on us. That's Jeremiah's second point, that God keeps shaping us and forming us. Like a potter working with clay. God keeps making and remaking us into that vessel that seems good to God. I took a pottery class in high school (anyone else take a pottery class?).

Half of the people in my class were there just because they wanted to goof off, but I was there because I wanted to make something. And I was excited about getting to make pots even if it was just an introduction to pottery. We didn't get to do any of the advanced things like throw pots on the wheel. But we did learn the simple joy of working with clay.

We learned how to press the clay and roll the clay and smooth the clay.

We learned to feel the walls of a pot for uniform thickness. And how check for places that might crack. And how to shape a lump of something with our hands into something useful and even beautiful.

The word for potter in Hebrew is 'yatsar'. Which comes from a word that means fashion or form or devise. It is the same word used in

Genesis when God creates the world and grabs a hunk of clay from the ground and fashions and forms and yastars it into a human being. It's a wonderful image. God, as an artist, molding and shaping us. Jeremiah has us recall that image of God at the potter's wheel. It is the artist once again at work. Re-fashioning God's people. Re-forming God's people. Again and again. As many times as it takes. Working and reworking until they take the shape that seems good to God.

Clay can be worked and re-worked. A pot can be broken down and started again. Our Creator knows that and knows what God wants us to be. And God didn't shape us once and for all. God didn't fashion us and then fire us in a kiln at high heat to be in one form forever and ever. We are not stuck in the shape we are in. God is still working with us, Jeremiah says. Still making and remaking us. God isn't through with us yet.

God isn't through with us. God isn't through with me or with you or with you or with you. We are still under construction. We are still being fashioned and formed by God. God is shaping us and molding us into the people of God. Bit by bit, little by little, we are becoming vessels for

faith and courage. We are becoming people of love and mercy. And God is using the things in our lives even now doing that. In that situation at work, or that job application process or that difficult class. God works through those things to form us, through that person, that relationship, that experience of caring for your parents or kids or grandkids. God is using that rough patch, that financial hardship, that struggle for understanding. God is using it to mold you and shape you to make you kinder and deeper and more faithful. And God is here to form you especially in a community of faith. In this church, in this fellowship, God is here, laying hands on you and shaping you with the words of scripture, and with the meal from this table, and with the water from this font, and with the work of service and mission and prayer. God is at work here on me. And on you. And on the person next to you too. And the person next to them. Yeah, everyone here; we are all under construction. God is at work on all of us, fashioning us into something together, making us into something much more than we are. God says, Can I not do with you just as the potter has done? Can I not fashion something even if it's just a lump of clay? Can I not refashion that life

that looks like a mess? And that person who looks like a wreck? Can I not make them or you into something new?, says the Lord. Yes, we say. Yes, of course you can, God.

God knows what we are made of. And God keeps working on us. And finally, God wants us to be at work on ourselves too. At the risk of sounding not very Presbyterian, part of this forming and reforming is in our hands too. Jeremiah says that the shape of our lives has something to do with us. We have some choice in the matter. Jeremiah switches his metaphor of potter and clay and the metaphor becomes startling, “Look, says the Lord, I am a potter shaping evil against you. Turn now, all of you, from your evil way and amend your ways and your doings.” You have a choice, says Jeremiah. Those things choose in life shape you too. How we choose to live matters. It matters how we spend our time and our energy and what we give our attention and focus to. That matters because we are shaped by those things. The game Tetris used to be a big thing. I had friends who were addicted to it when it came out. They would spend hours trying to fit all those descending puzzle pieces together. They would spend hours trying to level up. They would spend

so many hours they would start to see the pieces in front of them even when they weren't playing the game. They would even dream about it. It was Tetris puzzle pieces everywhere all the time.

In the same way, whatever we give our attention and focus to shapes our minds and our hearts. We are shaped by the friends we hang out with.

The activities we are in. The shows we watch, the magazines we read.

The things that matter so much to the world: sports and beauty and money and fame and sex and drugs and rock and roll. We can choose those things. And as people of God, we need to choose carefully.

Because we know those things will shape us. It's our choice whether we want busy-ness to shape us, or godliness to shape us. Whether we want cable news programs to shape us or the good news to shape us. Whether we want to be fed the line by the world around us that we aren't enough and we don't have enough OR to be fed at this table. By the God who knows us. And knows what we are made of. And is still at work on us doing a good, good thing with us. How can we better focus our time and our energy on what matters? How can we make sure its God who is shaping us and not anything else?

We are the clay and God is the potter. So, come, let us put ourselves in God's hands. Let us come to the table and to be formed and fashioned as God's people. O Lord, we ask you to shape us. Mold us. Make us into that creation that you know we can be, that best glorifies and honors you.