

# God's Shaping Hand

## Jeremiah 18.1-18

October 22, 2006

### Master of Imagination

Jeremiah had an artistic imagination. His imagination, used in the prophetic vocation, keeps us in touch with the reality of God and our essential lives. Jeremiah's imagination wakes us to the reality of God that permeates everything around us, shows us what our lives look like from the inside, and forces us to examine what we suppose we are doing and what God is doing in us.

*"This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 'Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message.'" Jeremiah 18.1-2*

God's task, through Jeremiah, is this: How can I get these people to take me seriously, right where they are? How can I get them to see that I am working, right now, silently and invisibly, but surely and eternally, in their lives and in their history?

*"So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel." Jeremiah 18.3*

### The Pot Spoiled

*"But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him." Jeremiah 18.4*

### Hope and Warning

Hope and warning join hands in this message:

*"Then the word of the LORD came to me: 'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?' declares the LORD. 'Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.'" Jeremiah 18.5-6*

He expands in both directions:

*"If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it." Jeremiah 18.7-10*

The people refuse to respond, to participate, to willingly involve themselves in the shaping purposes of God:

*"Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, 'This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.' But they will reply, 'It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart.'" Jeremiah 18.11-12*

### God the Potter

This is one of Jeremiah's most powerful sermons. The image has captured the attention of people of faith everywhere. Not the least of the reasons for its effectiveness is that Jeremiah experienced it before he preached it.

*"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah 1.5*

Jeremiah's potter shows me what I become as I submit my life to the creative and merciful God. Our lives become the pottery that makes possible the emergence of civilization – what Jeremiah called the "people of God," what Jesus called the "kingdom of God," what Augustine called the "city of God." It is no longer every man for himself.

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