

Second Presbyterian Church
September 7, 2025 || Year C – Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Jeremiah 18:1-11

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah.

‘The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: “Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. 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.

Then the word of the Lord came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the Lord: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you, from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.’

Holy wisdom, holy word.

Thanks be to God.

In a recent lecture from the psychotherapist Esther Perel, she described the ways in which a community knows that it has come back to life after suffering and trauma.

A community that is able to take risks – to engage with the unknown – to play – to be creative – to move from a place of safety to a place of mystery¹ is a resurrected community. It is a community that has re-entered the world with new breath in its soul.

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<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/where-should-we-begin-with-esther-perel/id1237931798?i=10007215366>
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While listening to Esther's description, *this* community – *this* congregation – *this* place to which God has called me – immediately entered my mind.

Your history – your work of intentional discernment – your love for all the saints – your faith toward Jesus Christ.

Your excitement, joy, and laughter. Your creativity and connectivity.

Your willingness to engage the unknown as a new pastor arrives.

You, Second Presbyterian, are vibrantly alive.

As I look upon your faces individually and collectively, I clearly see that the Potter's wheel has been spinning here and continues to do so, and it is humbling to stand before you as your pastor.

It is humbling for our baptismal waters to converge – splashing upon us as the Potter spins the wheel, adding my clay to your clay.

What will our artistic God create? How will we respond to the touch of the Potter's hands upon our clay?

My prayer is that we will patiently live these questions and imagine possibilities together.

For the vessel that is being created is a communal one.

So let's join Jeremiah at the potter's house.

It is important to know that the Lord appoints Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations, and his forty years of ministry coincide with the tumultuous reigns of various kings.

One king dies. Another king is dethroned by external political powers and forcibly removed to Egypt. Another king – who is violent, idolatrous, and unjust – dies by execution.

And while these various kings spin in and out of power, the Potter sits in a valley, near a water source, working at the wheel – tending to the dusty clay, fashioning an unformed substance into something fit for the Potter's eyes – into something good, right, and beautiful.

The Potter sits at the wheel – reworking what is spoiled. A reworking in which *both* the vessel and the Potter turn toward each other.

The Hebrew word for the potter's wheel – *ōben* – is also used to describe a midwife's stool.

In the midst of political chaos and death, new life is being fashioned.

New life that Jeremiah sees only after responding to the Lord's invitation to come and encounter the work of a humble Potter.

Jeremiah drops down into the presence of the Potter's house, and it is there that he hears the Lord's words.

The noise of the kings' spinning subsides, and the prophet encounters the hum of the wheel – Turn back. Pray. Turn back. Pray. Turn back. Pray.

This is the word you need to take to the people and inhabitants of the nations.

This is the word that you are called to speak to the kings.

This is the word that plucks up and pulls down, builds and plants.

This is the word that birthes a vessel.

I imagine the Potter speaking to the clay as it spins beneath her midwifing hands.

Turn back to me.

Let me shape and mold you.

Yes, kings injure you. Yes, the world injures you. Yes, your community injures you. Yes, you even injure yourselves.

And – my wheel always spins.

Dusty clay, by my grace, you never stay in that injured, spoiled place. By my grace, I turn back to you – working and re-working, transforming and re-shaping – so you may become a vessel that listens to my voice. A vessel that shapes me as I shape you.

A vessel of repentance instead of vengeance.

A vessel of healing instead of destruction.

A vessel of life instead of death.

Turn back. Pray. Become the treasure I created you to be.

Can you hear the Potter speaking to us now? Or has the spinning of kings become too loud?

If so, come to the Potter's house.

Descend into the presence of our triune God, and remember that we are a vessel centered by Christ, shaped by God's hands, and fired by the Holy Spirit.

Hear the hum of the wheel that centers us when kings de-stabilize us.

Turn to the God-who-became-clay. Turn back and pray to the God whose mind ultimately changes toward mercy and grace.

In a few moments, we will celebrate the joyful feast that is the Lord's Supper.

We will come down to the Potter's house that is our communion table, encounter Christ there, and share a meal as the vessel tenderly and lovingly forged by the quickening of the Holy Spirit.

Our communion chalices, patens, and pitchers come from two places.

The lighter stone pieces come from here.

The darker stone pieces come from Idlewild Presbyterian Church in Memphis – the community where I last served as a pastor and the community where God spun me into who I am today. Idlewild commissioned these pieces for me when I left – knowing that I would bring them here to y'all.

Their shimmery, midnight coloring reminds me of a dark sky's shift into dawn.

Two places. One table.

May the interweaving of our dusty clay be continually spun into the dawning light of our God.

In the name of our Creator, Potter, and Fashioner.

Amen.