

Seagrove, NC is an area of North Carolina known for its pottery. You drive down the road and you see lots and lots of little stores along the side of the road where you can go in and view pottery and purchase different pieces. It's a fascinating place because each potter has a different style and coloring. Each potter shapes his or her pottery somewhat differently than the other potters even though they are using the same type of clay.

You may not know it but York County also has a few potters. Not sure how many but we bought this piece from a York County potter near York not long after we moved here. We were looking for a chalice to match this plate which had come from Black Mountain, NC. Our previous chalice that went with the plate was broken at some point. When you have children sometimes things get broken.

We tried to find a piece of pottery that matched up with the piece that we already had. But if you look at both of these pieces you will notice that they are not the same. It is very hard to get one potter to match the design of another. This is the best we could do. And like I shared, this chalice is actually from here in York Co.

When we look at a piece of pottery, we may each be looking for something specific. We may be looking for a piece of pottery to go in a specific room in our home. We may be looking for a piece of pottery to decorate some specific place. We may be looking for a specific type of pottery. We may be looking at pottery to just admire the gifts of the potter.

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah saw a potter at work and as Jeremiah admired the work of this potter an image came to Jeremiah. He looked at this potter and saw an image of what God is like.

Jeremiah is a prophet in the Old Testament who preached during the last years that Judah was in existence. Judah was what remained of the United Kingdom and it was eventually conquered by the Babylonians in 587 BC. Israel, the other half of the united kingdom, had been conquered in 721 BC.

I imagine that Jeremiah was in a marketplace one day maybe looking for a piece of pottery that he needed for himself. Potters in that day were not making pottery for display. Potters made pots and bowls that were for everyday use. They were not the fancy pottery that we are used to seeing. They were the everyday items like the pots and bowls like we would need to use for cooking and serving.

But as Jeremiah looked at the potter work the clay that day, he realized something. He realized that this potter working the clay was one way to understand the way that God works.

Usually we have very idealistic images of a potter. We imagine a potter justly and lovingly working clay until it is molded into the perfect shape that the potter intends. As Jeremiah noticed this potter, however, he noticed that this potter had a lot of broken pieces at his feet. Broken pieces from pots that he had messed up and that he had to discard and start all over again.

As Jeremiah watched this particular potter break pots and start over again, Jeremiah began to realize that this was an image of God that he could claim. An image of God who is willing to break a few pots in order to get the type of pot that God wants.

An image of a God who doesn't settle for work that is less than the best. An image of a God who wants what is created to be special. But also an image of a God who may start to create a pot one way and then decide to do something different and change his mind.

Observing that potter that day taught Jeremiah a lot about God. But this may not be an image of God which we really like to see. For Jeremiah describes God as willing to break a few pots when God sees us start to behave in a way that is not pleasing to God. Jeremiah describes God as someone who expects us to give our very best and sometimes gets quite displeased when we do not follow the ways of God.

This passage of Scripture from Jeremiah is a hard passage for some of us to hear. It is hard for some of us to hear because we may have a church background in which we have been taught to fear a God who is vengeful and angry. I have talked to some of you who were raised in churches where this image of an angry God was drilled into you in your childhood. This caused you to leave the church because this image of God made you feel very disconnected from God.

But maybe there is another way of looking at this text than as an image of a vengeful God who is desiring to tear us apart every time we mess up. The first observation is that Jeremiah is not describing God breaking pots to represent individuals but a nation. Jeremiah says that God is tearing apart the nations of Israel and Judah in order to create something new. It is time for their dynasty to end and for something new to begin.

Another way to view this text is to see that God does not want us to settle in our relationship with God. God doesn't want us to simply coast in our relationship with God.

God doesn't want us to simply show up. Maybe God expects more from us than that. Maybe God believes that when we just show up that we are missing out on a lot of what God has to offer. And in order to push us to give more in our relationship to God, God is willing to break a few pots.

The cost of discipleship is emphasized in the New Testament lesson we read this morning. Jesus says to follow him means placing one's relationship with him ahead of one's relationship with their spouse, parent, or child. Jesus says that one must pick up their own cross and follow him. Jesus says to follow him means one gives up all of their possessions.

Giving up family, taking up a cross, and giving up all of one's possessions. That is some pretty hard stuff to do. We prefer to follow Jesus if it fits our family schedule, if it doesn't involve much work, and if we can exclude our money and investments. But it is clear that Jesus challenges us to take this faith thing pretty seriously.

To not be Sunday morning show up at church Christians. But to be the type of followers that examine everything in our lives and ask ourselves, "Are we trusting God with everything?" "Are we turning everything over to God?" Or are we trusting God with only part of our life?

If we are honest with ourselves we know that none of us trust God with everything. We hold back trusting God with all of our financial resources. We hold back our commitment of our time. We hold back on our relationships. But each time we hold things and relationships back we are not trusting God to be God over all of our lives.

I recently read a pastor who says that if we cannot trust God with everything in our lives then we may need to renounce our baptism. That is a pretty strong suggestion. But Jesus does make clear that following God means trusting God with everything in our life including our family, our time, and our money.

Maybe we have not done that very well lately. But Jeremiah reminds us that God is like a potter who breaks a few pots in order to start over again. Maybe we need God to break some of our habits.

Maybe we need God to break some of our behaviors so that we can start over. Maybe we need God to break some nations apart.

May we all learn to trust God with everything in our lives. AMEN.

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-Given: September 8, 2013 in Allison Creek (York, SC)