Our next reading will be coming from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was called by God to speak for God during a very difficult period. Jeremiah spoke for God while he lived in the southern kingdom of Judah around 622 BC until sometime around 586 BC.

This is the period of history when the last remnant of Israel, known as the southern kingdom of Judah which included Jerusalem, was conquered by the Babylonians. Jeremiah called out the disobedience of God’s people before and during this conquest by a foreign power.

The first words recorded in this book are Jeremiah’s call story where God speaks to him, but Jeremiah responds by saying that he is only a child. But God chooses to not listen to this excuse. Jeremiah is told by God that he will be speaking very difficult words on God’s behalf. Today’s text are some of these difficult words but also words of hope.

In this text, Jeremiah is going to use the image of God as potter to describe how God chooses to create and re-create human beings. But pay attention in this text about how difficult this process of re-creation is for humans. Pay attention to how God is described as a potter who does not discard broken pottery but reworks it into something new and different.

Also note that this is a text that lifts up God as artist. Many times we in the church do not appreciate art and how it helps us to understand who God is. This will not be the first time that the image of God as an artist is used. The first chapter of the first book of the Bible describes God as poet, designer, and landscaper.

The second chapter of Genesis describes God as a sculptor who creates humans out of the clay of the ground. Understanding art and artistic expression helps us to understand God.

**Read Jeremiah 18:1-11**

If we turn to the image of God as potter to describe our ideal faith journey, we would probably choose an image where God starts with the rudimentary materials and then starts to create us into something beautiful. We would probably choose a faith journey in which there are no complications and where the clay is formed into a pot perfectly the first time.

We would want our journey of faith to be one where there are no real hardships and we feel the guiding hands of God upon us and forming us into something beautiful. Something like this chalice that was formed by a potter here in York County from York County clay.

But for many of us a seamless transition from clay to beautiful pot is not the way our faith development is occurring. For many of us, we feel more like this shard of pottery that I have in my office. I picked up this piece of pottery from the desert in Israel when I was there a few years ago.

For all I know this pottery could go back to this period when our story in the Bible was written about Jeremiah. For some of us, our faith journey is painful and difficult. For some of us, we come into worship today feeling broken.

The story I am going to share is a difficult one to share. But it’s one person’s story of her faith journey which contains a very painful saga. This is the story of Rachael Denhollander, who revealed her painful secret of what happened to her at the hands of Dr. Larry Nassar.

Rachel kept a journal which documented her feelings while being abused by Dr. Nassar. Beginning in 2004, Rachael's cursive handwriting on each page of her journal detailed her vulnerability and her doubts that God cared. She feared she was somehow impure for her future husband.

"Save me O’ God," she wrote on the first line of the first page. No one was ever supposed to see that journal — certainly not the man who so horrifically violated her.

Nassar, once a famed sports medicine doctor, had stolen so much — her innocence, her trust, her relationship with her own body. It was the very same thing, the world would later learn, [that he’d done to more than 300 other women and girls](https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/2018/02/02/larry-nassar-sentenced-third-time-monday-now-265-say-they-were-abused/302439002/).

His abuse[went on for decades](https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/2018/03/08/larry-nassar-sexually-abused-gymnasts-michigan-state-university-usa-gymnastics/339051002/). [Olympians](https://www.indystar.com/story/news/crime/2017/11/10/aly-raisman-3-time-olympic-gold-medalist-says-she-abused-former-usa-gymnastics-doctor/852985001/). [College athletes](https://www.lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/local/2018/05/02/msu-nassar-abused-25-student-athletes-but-no-ncaa-rules-violations/575408002/). Young gymnasts. Women and girls who sought his help. And the[6-year-old daughter of family friends](https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/2016/11/22/bond-set-at-1m-for-former-msu-doctor-facing-sexual-assault-charges/94264864/).

What Nassar couldn’t have were Rachael’s deepest thoughts. For 12 years, she locked them away in 31 loose-leaf pages, until the moment she knew that her written words could stop him. So, Rachael made a sacrifice.

In August 2016, Rachael, now 34,[became the first woman to publicly say](https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2016/09/12/former-usa-gymnastics-doctor-accused-abuse/89995734/) that Nassar, a former Michigan State University and USA Gymnastics doctor, sexually abused her. Her account sparked one of the largest sexual assault cases in U.S. history. Her presence and sacrifice helped drive the stake that banished Nassar to prison for the rest of his life.

Rachael is steadfast in her call to do what’s right, no matter the cost. And for Rachael, what’s right is to travel the country to speak out for abused women and girls, to remind them of their intrinsic worth and to challenge churches, universities, and sports programs to do the right thing when allegations of abuse are exposed.

Recently Rachel spoke to the Southern Baptist Convention. More than a thousand Southern Baptists filled the convention center hall. Most only learned about Rachael 17 months earlier, at the end of Nassar's criminal cases when the world was captivated by her story and the stories of 155 other women he had assaulted.

Rachel didn't hesitate to condemn Southern Baptist pastors for failing to protect sexual assault victims from predators within the church.

She was surgical, deliberate, commanding as she spoke into a handheld microphone, never raising her voice; a woman telling men their role in a tradition that doesn’t allow women to preach.

"By and large, the survivor community loves the church," she told the crowd, filled with dozens of pastors, including some who resent her accusations and view her as an adversary.

"They love Jesus. They love the Gospel. I have found my greatest refuge and hope with the Gospel. And our desire is to see the church do this better so that it becomes the refuge it was intended to be.

“I think it is very telling that I have heard hundreds, literally hundreds, of sermons directed on the quiet and submissive sphere that a woman should have. I have heard not one on how to value a woman's voice. I have heard not one on the issue of sexual assault.

"… As soon as an issue comes along that needs to be fought for, all that masculinity disappears. And the women are left on the front line with you telling them, 'Be quiet, submissive, and fight your own battles. Do it. Better. Brothers."

For Rachael Denhollander, her faith journey has been very painful. Her faith journey meant trusting God to reveal her deepest secrets. It has meant exposing sexual abuse in colleges, in athletics, and, yes, in the church. Something had to be broken apart for her new and deeper understanding of God to emerge.

You may be undergoing something in your life breaking apart as well. It could be an image of God which is not working for you anymore. Breaking apart. It could be relationships in your life that were once very important to you. Breaking apart.

It could be a career that you thought was what you were equipped to do but now that is coming to an end. Breaking apart. It could be acceptance of a physical limitation concerning your body. Breaking apart. Something that you valued at one time is coming to a close. Breaking apart.

But Jeremiah reminds us that God takes our broken parts and makes something new. It ain’t easy. But friends, as Christians, we believe in Resurrection. We believe that God brought resurrection to Jesus and we believe that God can bring something new in our lives as well.

Recently someone reminded me that God is in the business of resurrection and not resuscitation. Meaning, we don’t need to try to keep something alive that needs to die. Some belief. Some program. Some relationship. Some idea. It is OK to allow things to break apart and die.

That is because God is in the business of resurrection. God the Potter is not through with us. God is taking our brokenness and making something completely new. Thanks be to God the recreating Potter. AMEN.

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-Mencarini, Matt, Louisville Courier, <https://www.courier-journal.com/in-depth/news/2019/09/04/rachael-denhollander-sacrifice-continues-after-accusing-usa-gymnastics-larry-nassar/1919109001/>

-Given: September 8, 2019 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)