St. Luke’s, Lemmon, SD **5TH SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY**  **02-06-22**

 SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

  **JEREMIAH 18:1-12**

 **AS THE POTTER SEES FIT**

*The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD , saying:* *Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause you to hear My words* *Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.*

*Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying:**O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter? says the LORD. Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!**The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it,**if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.*

 *And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it,* *if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it. Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says the LORD: “Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you.**Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.”*

*And they said,**“That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil heart.”*

Have you ever seen a potter at work—perhaps on television? A potter sits at a horizontal wheel that’s turning—like a spinning table in front of him. He puts a lump of soft clay on this “wheel” and begins to work. He uses his hands to shape and form the piece. He is able to make the clay into a short vase, a tall vase, a fancy vase, or just a plain flower pot--all with the work of his hands on the clay as the wheel goes round and round. The potter can do whatever he wants with the clay. He makes pieces as he sees fit. Such is the picture in our text today.

 The prophet Jeremiah was dealing with the leadership of Old Testament Judah. It’s about 600 BC. God’s patience was wearing thin with Judah; it was nearing its end. Stop there a moment. But isn’t it true that in Christ’s sacrifice, the debt for all sin has been paid? Isn’t it true that in Jesus, God loves us every day the same? Isn’t it true that God does not keep a log book of forgiveness and one day say, “That’s it. You have used up all the allotment of forgiveness for you. Your barrel is empty. Bye.” No, He does not. *“His compassions fail not. They are new every morning,” (Lamentations 3:23).* Yet it is also true, as this text bears out, that though God’s forgiveness is new, fresh, and full every day, His patience wears thin with those who insist on walking contrary to Him insisting, “My way is better, God!” Do you remember Pharaoh in Egypt? Moses told him that the LORD wanted Pharaoh to let His people go, but Pharaoh would not. God sent 10 plagues to break Pharaoh’s stubborn will. For the first seven, Pharoah said he would let them go, but when the plague was removed, “Pharaoh hardened his heart” and refused to let them go. God’s patience with proud and impenitent Pharoah reached its end. With the 8th plague, no longer does the Bible say Pharaoh hardened his own heart, but GOD HARDENED PHARAOH’S HEART. Now he could not repent. Judgment was upon him.

 That is the point in this text. God sent Jeremiah to the potter’s house. He saw the potter working on a vessel. When it didn’t pan out because of a flaw, a defect, He took the same lump of clay and started over to make something different. He mashed the clay together and used it for a different plan. Has it gone that way for you in the kitchen? What you’re making for dinner goes awry in the early stages, and you say, I’ll take what I have here and use it for a different item. Or maybe it was writing an essay or paragraph for school. The plans and worlds weren’t flowing, so scrap it, and start over.

 Here God says to wayward Judah, *O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter? says the LORD. Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!*Remember who you are, God says. I am the Potter; you are the lump of clay. Stop trying to tell Me your way is better. Remember, you’re just clay. I am the Potter. True, isn’t it? He formed us from the dust of the ground, If you don’t believe it, see what you look like in 800 years. Your Maker expects you to be the best, but how often don’t you of your own will follow Satan and give God the heave-ho? Your Maker sent His Son to be your Anointed Savior to rescue you with arms of love to restore you to your Father’s arms of love. You can’t do it. You’re just clay. Don’t try to boss the Boss.

 God, the Potter, has a different plan for you than He does for your cousin, brother, sister, neighbor. Each is different. Don’t cry out “UNFAIR.” Each person and life is unique. The LORD leads, guides, and blesses each as He knows is right and best. He loves all the same. Christ died for all, but each has a different function and role in life. Even earthly parents don’t treat all of their children 100% the same. Children have different needs, different personalities, different birth positions in the family. God is the Potter. He is infinitely smarter, and infinitely more capable than you. Don’t cry UNFAIR.

And don’t “toy with” God’s forgiving love in Jesus. They did. *And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it,* *if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it. Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says the LORD: “Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.”* Judah was toying with God’s forgiveness and God’s blessings. God had made great promises to the 12 Tribes of Israel and to the Tribe of Judah in particular. Jerusalem was the capital city located in Judah, the line of Kings from great King David ruled there. God had promised that a descendant of King David would occupy the throne some day to rule over God’s people forever, whose kingdom would never end. That’s Jesus! God promised he would protect Judah from all enemies, as He had in the past. He promised His Name would ever dwell at the Temple. But they toyed with Him, and His patience was rapidly running out. He was about to “smush” Judah. In spite of all His promises, He was about to ruin Judah. He was the potter; they the faulty piece of pottery and clay. He was about to bring the Babylonians against them to take them out of the land He promised them, destroy the city, demolish the Temple. And they would have no reason to cry UNFAIR.

 Do you toy with God’s mercy and His abundant earthly blessings? Are you careless with the possessions and resources God has given you? Do you abuse the vehicles and machinery God has allowed you to buy? Do you waste the food He has given you. Is it beneath you to eat leftovers? Do you fritter away the profit and money God has given you—buying things you don’t need, risking God’s gifts to you at the gambling games—“oh, well, I’ll get more.” OR, on the other hand, do you love your possessions and wealth too much--more than God? Can you cry UNFAIR if He takes all or some away from you? Do you toy with the loved ones God has given you?--being harsh and demanding of them, fault-finding and nit-picky? OR do you fail to honor and respect those whom God has placed over you? Can you cry UNFAIR if He takes them away in one fashion or another? Do you toy with God’s spiritual blessings in Christ?--the Lord, His Word, His House to gather at His feet? Are they of less and less value every year? OR are the things that He forbids, the things that you pursue? Do you think you can keep sin in your pocket and not get burned--because you’re not that bad? Can you cry UNFAIR if God takes away the opportunity to bask in His spiritual blessings in Christ’s salvation? When His patience runs out, He will mash the marred vessels with which he is working. And God is working with you, every day. He wants to improve you and make you evermore His devoted child each day.

 Are you guilty? We all are. Do not lose heart. The Lord was still calling even Judah to repentance. *“Return*  *now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.”* “*The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it,**if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.”* There areblessings and forgiveness awaiting you, awaiting the repentant heart. Even if God has already planned to root you up from the bottom, to pull you down from the top, to destroy you, He calls out to you yet today. You can say with Psalm 130, *“If You, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared,” (Psalm 130 :3-4).* Forgiveness awaits. Seek His pardon in Jesus. Come to the Lord’s table today. Personal assurance of His mercy is there. Jesus shares with you the very body and blood, His sacrifice of atonement, the life He gave up on the cross to make peace with the Father for your sins. In Jesus, the Potter relents. He will not pitch you aside. The Potter wants what is best for you, just as He made you—whether ordinary or ornate —He wants you to look to Jesus in faith and live in heaven.

 How did the people of Judah react to Jeremiah’s words? *“That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil heart.”* They mocked God’s invitation! They had no interest in a change of heart and life. “It’s hopeless to go with God” they said.. “We like it the way it is now.” ------ Years back I visited with a man, when it had come to light that he had been repeatedly unfaithful to his wife. I asked him how he could willfully, deliberately keep on doing what he well knew was wrong and hateful to God and to his dear wife. He said, Well, it was like this. “ I’m so bad now, I may as well just keep right on. There’s no stopping.” But there was. With a change of mind and conduct, he sought forgiveness of the Lord and of his wife,

They are still married today.

 Jeremiah would write later, *Behold the days are coming, says the LORD, that I will raise to David a Branch of Righteousness. A King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell in safety. Now this is the name by which He will be called--THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!*” (23:5-6). He is speaking of Jesus, in whom defective, yet loved lumps of clay, are granted righteousness and brought back home. In Him there is righteousness—even for you! Don’t turn away from the Potter

 So be it! Amen. Pastor Kanzenbach---