

## Pastor Letter: Lessons in Modeling Clay (9/3/22)

Just before entering my junior year of high school, my family moved back home to Pennsylvania after living in Georgia for seven years. As I struggled with culture shock and learning how to fit once again back into a Yankee society, I soon found myself entering college. I graduated from high school on Friday and three days later started college with summer classes. It was also culture shock at age 17 to be attending college with eight of my high school teachers. I was accustomed to refer to my teachers as Mr., Mrs., or Miss. and now I am calling them by their first names as my peers.

When the fall classes began, I found myself enrolled in a freshman art class. The professor instructed us to purchase a 10-pound block of modeling clay and to create an art project using this clay. A student was hired to be our human model and would move to any pose which would help us design our work of art. Initially the beautiful model was very distracting to a warm blooded teenage male college student and it was difficult to concentrate on forming a human figure out of modeling clay that looked like her.

I quickly discovered that if I wanted to form anything out of the modeling clay, it had to be softened by working the clay in my hands. Until the clay became malleable in my warm hands, it was almost impossible to form into any shape that resembled a human figure. It was also impossible to attach anything I created today onto anything I had previously formed in a prior class. As I struggled with the unresponsive clay, my inability to create what my mind envisioned, and my impaired vision to discern the minute details of the model's body structure. It became very evident, that I did not have an artist's eye nor an artist's ability to duplicate the human form into a clay reproduction.

I recall one day I was having a very difficult time in forming the shape of my clay model's back. Try as I might, I could not make my clay figure take on the shape of our human model. When I asked the professor for some help, he merely took a wooden tool, cut a deep gash down the center of my figure's back, and manipulated both sides of the gash with his two thumbs, creating a perfect shape of a human's back within five seconds. The art teacher could see what I could not envision and had the ability to reproduce that human image into the clay. After watching the art teacher's quick but subtle movements, I then could see what had been hidden within the inanimate clay and better understood why I was required to attend this freshman art class.

This week's Old Testament passage about a potter reminded me of that fateful day when I struggled with the dynamics of modeling clay, my inability to recognize the minute details of the human body, and my lack of proficiency in creating realistic art from a block of inanimate clay. Only in the hands of a genuine and skillful artist could the modeling clay take on the shape of the true image of Almighty God.

As human beings, we are very much like that block of modeling clay I possessed in art class in college. We are rigid in opinion, solid unmovable objects, hard of hearts, resistance to change, and very unwilling to modify in any shape or form. It is only when we repent, allow God to break down our rigid exterior shells, massage us in his loving hands, soften our hardened hearts, and mold us into whatever form he wills, can we ever become useable instruments for the enhancement of the Kingdom of God.

The Lord instructs the prophet, Jeremiah, to go down to the potter's house for a living image of what God intended for the nation of Israel and other surrounding nations. Jeremiah writes, "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," (Jeremiah 18:1-4).

The united nation of Israel was called to become a instrument of salt and light to the other nations of the world. If she would not fulfill that calling, God's judgement would come upon her just as the potter reformed the clay into another desired vessel.

As an individual, a specific church, or a chosen nation chooses to disobey our heavenly Father, the triune God may choose to bring judgment by breaking us down, destroying us, and starting all over in order to create his desired obedient vessel in order to enhance the Kingdom of God. Jeremiah's experience of the reshaping of the clay in the potter's hands should also be a living reminder of our current walk of faith and how we are clay in the potter's hand.

We should take Jeremiah's words to the unrepenting nation of Israel as the Word of God for ourselves, our church, and our nation. Jeremiah penned these words, "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 ways, and amend your ways and your doings," (v 11). This Word of God should encourage each of us to examine our walk of faith, discern any evil characteristics in our lives, repent of those evil traits, seek forgiveness, and ask Almighty God to remodel us into obedient Children of God.

My art professor had an artist's eye and the skills of a genuine artist to create realistic life forms from an inanimate block of clay. Our Lord also has these same attributes that enables him to transform us into useful and beautiful vessels that can serve the Kingdom of God, if only we humble ourselves, surrender to the Lord's restructuring process, and faithfully serve as whatever vessel he has reshaped us.

May each of us humbly learn to submit to the Lord's remodeling process, surrender to the Lord's will, and accept the shape of whatever vessel the Lord choses to create of us.

Pastor Larry