

Text: Jeremiah 18:1-11

^{18:1} This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² “Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message.” ³ So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. ⁴ But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

⁵ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁶ “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. ⁷ If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, ⁸ and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. ⁹ And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, ¹⁰ and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

¹¹ “Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, ‘This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.’ (NIV84)

Prayer of the Day:

Gracious Lord, our refuge and strength, pour out your Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep them steadfast in your Word, protect and comfort them in all temptations, defend them against all their enemies, and bestow on the Church your saving peace; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. If you continue in my Word, you are really my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. Alleluia. (John 8:31,32 cf. RSV)

Sermon Text:

A tormented monk sat in his room. More and more it seemed as if the world around him was going mad. How could the church be so obsessed with money that it was willing to sell forgiveness? He picked up his quill and he began to write. On October 31, 1517, he sought a debate with the clergy and the theologians of the church so he wrote in Latin. He posed 95 statements, theses, which were designed to address the matters that were so vexing. Among the very first was repentance. “*When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance* (Thesis 1 of Martin Luther’s 95 Theses).” This was not something that one could throw money at in order to make it better. Sin is a regular guest in the heart of the Christian and so repentance will be the air they would breath.

Jeremiah who so eloquently spoke of our hope in Christ last week knows this truth well also. Israel not, unlike the Catholic Church of Luther’s day, regularly struggled when it came to her place with God and so she regularly struggled with the things of the world around her. Would she listen to God or make alliances with the nations around her? Would her pride be in the power of the Almighty or in the possessions she had accumulated? Would she follow the often tenuous and hard path of her Savior or the life of ease and comfort Satan dangled before her eyes?

God's Word came to His prophet, *This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message."*³ *So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel.*⁴ *But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.*⁵ *Then the word of the LORD came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.*

God is reminding Israel who they are. Of course, we could say as Israel then so God's chosen people today. Isaiah spoke very similarly, *Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand* (Isaiah 64:8). Clay may not be the most regal of pictures for us, but it is the most accurate. Fashioned and made by our God, He knows what is best for us. He knows His intentions for us. David once wrote, *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be* (Psalm 139:13–16).

Ah, but then there is something wrong with this clay. It was marred in the hand of the maker, flawed it was not to be what the potter had originally intended. Sin destroyed the image God cast us in way back in the garden. It would need to be refashioned, we would need to be remade. God announces, *"If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned."*⁷ *And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it."*⁹

As Luther's theology continued to form and take shape under the Word of the Almighty, the cross would begin to take center stage once again. This would be true both of the teaching of Christ and His atoning sacrifice and the molding power of the cross for the Christian. So often in hardship and tribulation the Lord forms His people, shaping them to His will, His way, His Word. As sin destroyed the perfect image of God, so God would destroy the sin that raged within His people and reshape them into His people once again. For Israel, it would mean the pain of deportation, the loss of house and home, the cruel hand of bondage for a people once proud and free. For Luther, God would take a monk vexed by the state of the world around him, vexed by the sin that raged within him and use him to proclaim His holy Word.

But we must note something in all of this. The potter never throws away the clay but instead lovingly fashions it into something useful, something better than the marred mess it was before. So God does with us.

"Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, 'This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.'

Now we begin to peer into the mind of God. His goal is not the destruction of Israel, not even as He plans against them and prepares disaster for them. His goal is always the same: to lead them away from the sin that plagues them into His saving love and light. So it was in Germany and throughout the world of 1517. So it remains today.

As Martin Luther cleaned up the abuses and false doctrines surrounding confession and absolution, as He battled against the abuses of indulgences and the greed which had gripped the church, He penned the parts of confession in the Small Catechism. We spoke them at the opening of our service today. He began with the very first part, *Confession has two parts. The one is that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution or forgiveness from the pastor as from God himself, not doubting but firmly believing that our sins are thus forgiven before God in heaven.*

This, dear friends, is the heart and core of reform and the heart and core of repentance. We as Israel before us, yes, even as the church of Luther's day, even as the vexed and tormented monk himself are marred clay in the hand of the Potter Himself. As such we deserve nothing but the wrath of God unleashed upon sinful human beings. This is why sleep sometimes eludes us, why despair often assails us, why our consciences war against us in ways we often refuse to talk about even with our family and our friends.

But it is not what God gives us. In love, the hands which created us, seek to save us. The One Who forms all things takes on a form with us. The one who so often uses crosses to discipline us, makes His way to the cross on our behalf. This is how God shows His love. Nowhere do we see it more clearly than as He lifts His voice in the pain and agony we deserve to announce that *it is finished* (John 19:30). You are remade. Your salvation is sure.

Oh, brothers and sisters, sometimes we sit like Luther, in the silence of our homes and wonder what is wrong with the world. But just like him, we secretly already know the answer. It is not in the world out there. It can't be fixed with power or money. It's the sin that rages within us and all around us that is the real problem and there is only one solution, mean for each one of us. So God gives us Jeremiah, and his **REFORMATION CALL TO REPENTANCE**. May it be the air we as God's people breathe, *not doubting but firmly believing that our sins are thus forgiven before God in heaven* in Christ alone, by God's grace alone, given through faith alone, as told in Scripture alone. Yes, to God alone be the glory forever and forever. Amen!