

The Potter's Wheel



Found in the earth,
and bound to it
and to He that made it.
It is dusty and grey,
without form
until He forms
and reforms it
into what it is to be.
In His hands, perfect.

Watered until the thirst is slaked,
the edges are smoothed and shaped
by careful fingers.
It spins
round and round
and round again
until the tender touch
has made the purpose plain.

And what has been made of the earth
is finished in the belly of the fire,
radiant in the flame.

The vessel is ready,
and is given its name.

Jeremiah 18: 1-6

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.

Then the word of the Lord came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

When I first read this extract from the prophet Jeremiah I was reminded about what we say on Ash Wednesday – “You are but dust and to dust you shall return..”

Clay in its natural and unworked state is dusty and of a single, rather ashen grey colour until someone fashions it, paints it and fires it – interestingly, the colour that goes onto the pot may not be the colour that it comes out as once firing is completed. The heat process transforms the colour and the finish in a way that we may not expect, and it takes the skill of the potter to know what colours to apply and how, and what temperature to fire the still unfinished vessel so that its glazed or unglazed finish is suitable for its purpose. The glaze is “brought to maturity” in the kiln.

I'd like to think that the potter has an image of the finished item in his or her mind before starting to spin the wheel and work the clay. The start of the process is messy and requires much water and incessant spinning – the potter must be prepared to be covered in clay spatter as he or she works to bring art to life.

These words from Jeremiah remind us that sometimes we have to be reworked to suit the purpose or the circumstance in which we find ourselves. This time of pandemic feels to me that exactly that is going on right now – we have discovered new ways of connecting with each other and with God. We have learned over many, many months what is truly important to us and as we have tripped our way through lockdown after lockdown we have had to let go of our ego and take pleasure in the small blessings we receive.

Let us then as a church, as a community of Christ continue to move with the shaping and forming that God has been doing with us as individuals and as a community.

Let us centre ourselves within the movement of the wheel. Let us notice the touch of the cooling water and feel the warmth of the potter's hands as he holds us and moulds us between strong fingertips. There is always purpose with God. May we never forget that nothing is wasted. We can see from today's reading that the pot was reworked and the new shape was pleasing to the Creator. It was not simply abandoned but started over with intention.

Let us submit ourselves to that same reworking, and commit to being open to whatever new shape church will take as we look towards easing out of lockdown prayerfully and carefully.

Let us stand together in the fiery gaze of our ever-loving God and wonder at the variety of shapes and colours that he is creating in all of us and marvel at how brightly we can stand together – each with our own fashion and purpose ready to serve God and each other in love.