

Homily 4th September St Mary Cray.

Jeremiah 18.1-11

Luke 14.25-33

Canon Alison Tyler

Who I am today, the person I am now is not who I was 50 years ago, or five years ago, or even one year ago. It's not just that I am older and that things have changed and moved on. I mean I am actually different. I've been shaped and reshaped, created and recreated. Looking back on my life and my experiences, I can see I have been living, actually living, on the potter's wheel as described for us by Jeremiah. Think about it and how your life has been, because I think it works like that for all of us.

Whilst damp and on the wheel, there is always room for modification and improvement until the piece is ready to be fired, and after firing it is fixed into a permanent shape as a cup, or a bowl something beautiful and useful. But until then change is always possible. So, I am or we are, still not finished, I am or we are, still able to be changed, still able to be transformed by the action of God the potter on and in our lives/ or my life.

Because until the clay that has been fired it can be shaped and reshaped almost infinitely.

It is a material of possibilities, mouldable, flexible, responsive

God, as the potter takes the clay of our lives—people and relationships, successes and failures, circumstances and experiences, things we have done or left undone, choices made and opportunities missed, joys and sorrows, in fact everything that we are and do — God takes all of this and transforms it, makes and reworks it as Jeremiah says “into another vessel, as seems good to him.”

Likewise, the history of God's relationship with the people and the nation of Israel involves them often being rebellious and disobedient and worshipping other Gods, often being forgiven and then doing it all again throughout the whole history of their relationship with God.

So, Jeremiah invites us to consider God the maker, God the artist.

Genesis first shows us God as Creator, maker, designer and artist, the one who speaks the Word and all Creation comes into being, from nothing into all its richness, and in Genesis 2 God is shown shaping the clay and forming humankind from the dust of the earth, in all our richness and diversity, breathing into us the breath of life. God is continually at work sustaining and renewing the Creation and sustaining and renewing us in the same way. Changing mud into living human beings.

A potter working with clay was an everyday skilled transforming activity in the ancient world, and it still goes on today people make pottery by hand. Whilst watching this everyday but transforming task, Jeremiah received God's instructions to call the people to repentance yet again. Including another prophetic warning that the consequences of failure to honour God and to remain faithful can be severe.

And yet despite the warning, and the previous bad experiences God has had with the people, God still makes clear that there is time for change and repentance, there is still time 'Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.'

It's clearly what God wants his people to do, metanoia which means turning around, starting again and repenting – God has great plans for his people, and he wants the

Israelites and us, to change completely which can be both worrying and feel threatening, as well as challenging and exciting. God wants his people to make good choices, but he does not compel them to make good choices, he invites them, and also invites us. As we respond to God, so God responds to us.

Hebrews 10:31 says 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' some translations say is an awful thing and others that its terrifying, but just think about it, as clay in the hands of the potter - fearful or not, we are already in God's hands and we know that God loves us and wants us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and to grow more like him, that same Jesus who loves us so much that he died for us. As we grow in our faith and practice our faith we come to realise it would be an even more fearful thing to fall out of the hands of living God, to be nowhere, and to lose all the possibilities that God offers for growth, change and new life, for transformation.

And just think again, fearful can mean not just afraid, but also full of awe and wonder and reverence, and recognising God's power and mercy being full of such love for God who loves us and sent his Son Jesus to us. In this sense we can have so much reverence and respect that we will choose to follow God and let God direct and transform our lives.

As we follow our faith journey, Jesus in Luke's gospel is on His own journey, since Luke 9 he has been on the way to Jerusalem and to the Cross, and because he knows he will suffer, he underlines the demanding nature of the life of faith, of following him and sharing the good news of the kingdom.

It will cost him his life. He urges those following, to consider what it might cost them or us. To weigh up the costs of our commitments before we make them, to take the risk of faith knowing the hazards. We need to know the risk and then as that book title once said 'feel the fear and do it anyway'.

Jesus uses really extreme, over the top language to try and show us that nothing is more important than loving and following him. Get that part of our lives right and all the rest will fall into their proper place. It does work, experience shows me that loving God first informs and improves all my loving relationships – I love better because I love God.

The cost of faith is very high, it is about forgetting ourselves and our own interests, and focusing instead outwards on loving God, and our neighbour, as we love ourselves. We stop being the most important thing in our lives, love ourselves and so also our neighbours properly, and we shift or change our perspective to share God's values and viewpoint.

We are approaching; indeed, we have already started getting to grips with a modern and different cost of living crisis, when very difficult decisions will be needed, priorities may need to be changed and we will need to consider the practicalities of loving God in loving our neighbours as ourselves – and there are no easy answers or solutions.

It will be a time of change and possible transformation and the outcomes are unpredictable, we need now more than ever to trust and hope in God, to believe that the potter has the skill needed, and then to hold that hope for our sisters and brothers.

Our prayer for the days ahead is for God's light in darkness and God's grace in uncertainty. May we know both God's light and grace and God's peace in our hearts,
Amen