

7 December 2011
Advent 2 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Pottery Barn”

Text: Jeremiah 18:1-11; 2 Corinthians 4:6-18; Luke 1:46-55

Sometimes the hardest things to see are the things right in front of you. Looking for the glasses that are right on top of your head, looking for that pencil that is right behind your ear, looking for the car keys that are right in your hand. The question for us tonight is: How often is that the case for us with God and His work in our lives?

That was the problem with the people of Judah. They saw the armies of the nations around them. They saw how the evil seemed to prosper and the faithful suffered. What they didn't see is God, and so they assumed, like many today assume, that that meant He wasn't working, that He didn't care, that He didn't see or was unable or unwilling to help. And so they turned away from Him and either took matters into their own hands, or turned to other gods for help.

But sometimes the hardest things to see are the things right in front of you. And so God's task, through Jeremiah, was this: To help the people of Judah - and you and me today - see that God is working, perhaps silently and invisibly, but surely and eternally, in our lives. To help us see beyond the here and now to what we will be in ten or twenty years from now, and that there is a connection between what we are going through now and what we will be then. To see the continuities between God's work in Abraham and Moses and David and His work in us today. To get us out of our own little self-centered universes to see the glorious working of God among us. That we may trust. That we may believe.

And so, God instructs Jeremiah, ***go down to the potter's house***. Now, Jeremiah had undoubtedly been there many times and seen potters at work before. They were quite common. But this time was different. This time the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah and showed him something different - that here was a picture of God at work, shaping and forming His people. Sometimes that meant building up, sometimes that meant tearing down; sometimes that meant delicate touches, sometimes that meant hard compression . . . but never giving up and never careless, and always with an end in mind - a finished piece both beautiful and useful, and also *unique*. For in Jeremiah's day, pottery was not mass produced like it is today - thousands all the same. Then, each piece was formed by the hand of the potter one at a time. A work of art. No two exactly the same. Each had different curves and shapes, different designs and patterns, different painting and glazing.

But each just right. Each a *child*, so to speak, of the potter.

The season of Advent, with its focus on the *coming* of Christ to us, now and in glory at the end of time, calls us not only to repent - as we considered last week - but also to see with the eyes of faith the careful and caring hand of God working in your life, forming and preparing you not just for tomorrow, but for eternity. Or as St. Paul put it: ***this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.***

So see, O people of God, *what is right in front of you*. That our Lord's "Pottery Barn" is His Church, His hand is His Word, and His wheel is the cross. And here, through these means, He is coming to you and working in you. His Word of Law and Gospel tears down and presses us hard into repentance, and then builds up and soothes with His forgiveness. His cross never crushes but it does kill, so that He raise us to newness of life. And by His Spirit He does this in each of us differently. Christians are not massed produced or all the same. You are a work of art, worth your Saviour's time and effort, to be both beautiful and useful to Him. A child of your Father in heaven.

It took Jeremiah a while to see all this. He did not have an easy life or an easy career as a prophet. He was hated and mistreated in many and various ways for speaking this Word of God to the people. But with this picture of the potter he was not only given a word to preach, but a word to *believe* - for God had told him the same thing when he called him to be a prophet, as we heard last week. For at that time he told Jeremiah: *Before I formed you in the womb I knew you* (Jer 1:5). God is the potter, the former, in Hebrew the *yotzer*; and you are the *yatzah*, what He is forming.

It is not the other way around, though that's what we often want to think and the way we want it to be. That we are forming our own lives, our own futures, our own destinies, and we want to shape God to fit what we want. But that way leads only to death. For we are not *yotzers*, potters, and when we put our hand to the wheel, we quickly make a mess of it all. That is what happened to Israel and now to Judah. And so Jeremiah is calling on them - and us - to repent and to trust the real *yotzer*, the real potter, the One who made us in the womb, and is forming us now, that life be at work in us.

And that you and I might see this, our Lord does not send us to the potter's house, but to the manger. His manger. For truly there is our Lord's "Pottery Barn" - where the Son of God is born in human flesh that the image of God be restored to mankind. That we see are realize that our Lord who came to us in the flesh then, comes to us in His Word and Sacrament now, that life be at work in us.

And so we heard the words of Mary tonight, after she was told the astonishing news that she was chosen to be the mother of our Saviour. That just as the Lord formed Jeremiah in the womb, so too would He now form His own Son in Mary's womb, knitting together the divine and human natures into one wonderful person, the Son of God and Son of Mary. And how like Jeremiah was Mary's reaction: How shall this be, *since I am only a youth*, said Jeremiah . . . *since I am a virgin*, said Mary? But God's Word does what it says.

Yet at this Word, it was not only Jesus being formed in the womb of Mary - Mary was being formed as well - the master potter at work - that Mary see past what was now before her, the difficulties and problems, the pain and sorrow, to the glory that was at work in her and was being prepared for her. That she be enabled to confess: ***My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.***

Advent calls us to confess this same truth. To magnify the Lord and rejoice in His work. To stop the complaints and begin the repentance; to let go of the wheel and see what God is at work forming in our lives; to see with the eyes of faith what is right in front of us: our Lord coming to us to do great things for us. To bring us down from our thrones to exalt us to His throne. To make us hunger for His good things and not be satisfied with filling ourselves with the good things of this world. To fulfill the Word ***He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.***

That Word is still being fulfilled here and now. Our Lord still coming, still forgiving, still loving, still forming. That you may have life. And so we pray, yes! Amen! Come, Lord Jesus.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.