

**Isaiah 64: 8-9** (NRSV) –

<sup>8</sup>Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;  
we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.

<sup>9</sup>Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,  
and do not remember iniquity forever.  
Now consider, we are all your people.

**Jeremiah 18:1-4, 6**

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup>“Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” <sup>3</sup>So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. <sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>6</sup>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.

**“Formed”**

Some years ago “Life” magazine described Steve Bailey as a “Choco Valentino,” a “Maestro of the Kiss,” and the “Candy Man” from Lebanon, PA. Steve worked for the Hershey Corporation and at that time was a quality assurance person who had about 20,000 Hershey’s Kisses pass his inspection station every minute! Steve’s job was to search for anything less than sheer chocolate Kiss perfection. The large majority of the 1.2 million Kisses that passed him every hour were perfect by the time they reached him. But, occasionally some pieces didn’t quite pass the test.

You see, the public’s expectations of what a Hershey’s Kiss is supposed to look like when it is unwrapped are high! Each Kiss was to be exactly 15/16ths of an inch in diameter at the base, there must be a smooth appearance with no listing to one side, and above all, the curl at the top must not be standing up too straight or drooping too low.

Now, here’s a question. What happens to the Kisses that fall short of these lofty requirements? The answer is that Steve would brush them aside to a *catch off pan* where they go into a process that is called, **the rework**. In the **rework** the defective pieces are melted down, the chocolate is mixed with another batch, and the process starts all over again.<sup>i</sup>

The **rework** reminds me of the Parable of the Potter in Jeremiah 18. While this parable is directed at the country, Israel, I think that it is just as powerful when we think of it in terms of our own lives. “*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.”*

You see, the potter is singular in purpose: the potter intends to make vessels which will be useful and bring honor to the potter, even if that usefulness and honor are not immediately apparent to others.

Making pottery and making chocolate Kisses have some similarities. If they don't turn out as originally intended, they have another chance at being reworked, reformed, regenerated, re-purposed, even REDEEMED! You see, that concept is exactly the “Tie that Binds us to God,” our creative potter. Remember that old saying, “God doesn't make junk!”?? To the God who FORMED each and every one of us, everyone is valuable, precious, and worthy of being refashioned, reclaimed, reworked, and yes, REDEEMED in order prove God's love for us. For in this life, true perfection is rare.

A water bearer in India had two large clay pots, each hung on the end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For two full years, this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water in his master's house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection and miserable because it was only able to accomplish half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. “I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you.” The bearer asked, “Why? What are you ashamed of?” The pot replied, “For these past two years I've only been able to deliver half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you don't get full value for your efforts.”

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion, he said, “As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path.” As they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it somewhat. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, “Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your crack, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, the master would not have this beauty to grace his home.”<sup>ii</sup>

Every time the human family and its individual members showed signs of wear, or were damaged, cracked, dropped, or smashed, God reached out to offer re-formation, reworking, redeeming. God sent Jesus, God’s own son to us to show us the full extent of God’s love, and the desire for each of us to know our usefulness, and to show God honor. Jesus looked upon humanity, and treated us with compassion, giving his very life that we might have access to being redeemed.

That is the powerful reminder which is before us as we come to the Lord’s table for the sacrament of Holy Communion. Knowing the flaws of the human condition, knowing that he would be betrayed, denied, and crucified, Jesus shared an experience of redemption, reworking, renewing, and restoring those / WE imperfect human beings. As we receive this sacrament of grace, we are Formed anew, given a fresh start, deemed worthy of Christ’s sacrifice of love. While Hershey’s Kisses would certainly droop or perhaps melt in this heat, rendering them unfit for sale, God’s love renews us even when we are weary, and droopy, misshapen or listing to one side. God then forms us with renewed purpose and strength for service and witness. May we approach this time of redemption with the song in our hearts:

*Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way!*

*Thou art the potter; I am the clay.  
Mold me and make me after thy will,  
While I am waiting, yielded and still.*

*Fill with thy Spirit till all shall see  
Christ only, always, living in me!<sup>iii</sup>*

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<sup>i</sup> Duncan, King. “On Being Picked For The Rework,” eSermons.com, *adapted*.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.moralstories.org/the-cracked-pot/> *adapted*

<sup>iii</sup> Words by Adelaide A. Pillard, 1902. (UM Hymnal #382)