

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18 (NASB)

O Lord, You have searched me and known *me*.
2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
You understand my thoughts from afar.
3 You scrutinize my path and my lying down,
And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.
4 Even before there is a word on my tongue,
Behold, O Lord, You know it all.
5 You have enclosed me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.
6 *Such* knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is *too* high, I cannot attain to it.

For You formed my inward parts;
You wove me in my mother’s womb.
14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.
15 My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;
16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;
And in Your book were all written
The days that were ordained *for me*,
When as yet there was not one of them.
17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
18 If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.
When I awake, I am still with You.

Jeremiah 18:1-6 (NASB)

The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, 2 “Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will announce My words to you.” 3 Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. 4 But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make.

5 Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 6 “Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter *does*?” declares the Lord. “Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.

Molded by the Master Potter

The book of the Prophet Jeremiah is COMPLICATED! It is complicated historically, theologically, and spiritually. Today’s passage from chapter 18, verses 1-6 comes in the midst of some significant complexities, most of which I will NOT take the time to unpack this morning. So, let me just give you a brief summary of where we are and what is happening with our prophet.

The time period is the late 600’s and early 500’s before the time of Christ, and God is **not** happy with how people are behaving in Judah. God taps Jeremiah to give the news to the people that because of their evil ways, God intends to “pluck up,” “pull down,” and “destroy” the community due to their worship of other gods, oppression of neighbors, and political practices which were doing harm.

While God has been giving Jeremiah the message of doom and gloom to be delivered to the people of Judah, Jeremiah has been entreating God to choose a different strategy for disciplining the people because they are not all bad. In fact, Jeremiah pleads for God to change the plan, as he is seeking repentance from those who have transgressed. And that is where we pick up with today’s reading.

This time, God communicates with Jeremiah with a real life illustration of God’s intended interaction with the people of Judah. “Go down to the potter’s house,” God tells Jeremiah. There Jeremiah observed the ordinary activity of any potter of the day. The potter was forming a vessel out of clay on the turning wheel. The first effort does not turn out as well as the potter had hoped; it does not meet the high standard for pottery which contains that potter’s mark. And so the potter starts over, and reforms the clay into a more pleasing vessel.

While this is far from the end of the story of this encounter between God, Jeremiah, and the people of Judah, THIS is the point of ultimate HOPE. It would appear that God’s strategy for disciplining these wayward people is changing. God is responding with supreme compassion toward these humans. God’s mind is changed from an intention to destroy to an intention to save. God changes from an intent to do harm to an intent to do good. God sees potential within this community of people, and decides to

invest the effort into remolding, reshaping, rebuilding, and renewing the people. This metaphor of the potter with the spoiled-then-reformed vessel reminds us that God has created each of us with the intention that we will be useful persons of beauty. And when we become flawed, marred, blemished, lopsided, leaky, or otherwise messed up, God is willing to work with us, to continue to shape us, and give us another opportunity to live into God’s intention for us. There is always HOPE when we allow God to remake us!

And, that premise does not just hold true for me, and for you, but for all of God’s creation. So, if we are to have HOPE in the Master Potter’s desire and ability to mold us even after we are found to fall so far short of God’s expectations for us, then we must also be mindful of all of the marginalized persons. Our thoughts concerning our fellow flawed vessels, should reflect the thoughts of Christ ~ God’s ultimate expression of HOPE toward us! Paul aptly wrote: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” But, being mindful alone is not enough. Our compassionate thoughts should be followed by actions which embody God’s ability to shape and work through us! When we recognize the grace of being reshaped and repurposed for useful good following a time of listing, leaking, and being messed up, we should be moved to take action to make a meaningful difference in this global community. The Potter finds a way to use what we might discard. The Potter sees value in that which humans may think is beyond hope. So we must change our perspective and response.

Some of you are likely familiar with the centuries-old Japanese art of “**KINTSUGI**,” which some call the “Art of Precious Scars.” Widely accepted legend from the 15th Century states that Japanese shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa sent a cracked tea bowl back to China to be repaired. Upon its return, Yoshimasa was displeased to find that it had been mended with unsightly metal staples. This motivated contemporary craftspersons to find an alternative, aesthetically pleasing method of repair, and **Kintsugi** was born.

There are three methods of **Kintsugi**, each using gold-dusted epoxy to fix the broken pottery, leaving golden lines where the repairs were made

either by joining or patching. The result is treating breakage and repair as part of the history of the object, rather than something to disguise.

Since its conception, ***Kintsugi*** has been heavily influenced by prevalent philosophical ideas. Namely, the practice is related to the Japanese philosophy of *wabi-sabi*, which calls for seeing beauty in the flawed or imperfect. The repair method was also born from the Japanese feeling of *mottainai*, which expresses regret when something is wasted, as well as *mushin*, the acceptance of change.

Japanese aesthetics VALUES marks of wear by the use of the object. And the scars formed through the repair of cracks and breakage actually increases the monetary value of the vessel. Every repaired piece is unique, because of the randomness with which the breakage happened and repairs made, thus forming irregular patterns that sparkle with the metallic glue. The scars become the source of great beauty!

Oh, that we human beings could understand ***Kintsugi***, and show respect and value for the broken times in our lives and the lives of others, that were healed by the touch of the Master Potter! In compassion, God sees the beauty and usefulness of even our most broken moments, when they contribute to the scars which produce wisdom, endurance, and compassion toward others.

God doesn't give up on us. God sent God's own Son to save us from our most broken times and heal us. If God doesn't give up on us, shouldn't we be looking for what is most precious in one another?

PRAYER:

Creating God, Master Potter,
Take the clay of our lives and shape it to love;
Take the clay of the church and shape it to grace;
Take the clay of the world and shape it to peace;
Take the clay of today and shape it to hope.
And where there is brokenness, mend us with your healing power,
That we may be ever more precious, and wise,
And loving toward each and every cracked pot. Amen.