

**'You Can Trust The Potter's Hands'**

I've often watched a show on TV about a group of people who haven't mastered the art of pottery, but they're giving it a red-hot go. They face a weekly challenge, are judged amidst a lot of laughter I have to say, on how well they did and at the end of the show there's a winner and they face the next week to have another go at getting it right. At the end of the series, they're better than they were at the beginning, they've learnt a lot as they went along, they've formed friendships and leave the series a much challenged and changed person. They're not professional potters; however they've risen to the challenge and allowed themselves in the craft of pottery to move from where they were to where they now are.

Jeremiah's use of the imagery of the potter and the clay today has used these two things to show us in a clear and uncomplicated way the relationship between God and us – God's people, a reflection of the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and those people who choose to take notice and live lives in conjunction with Christ's covenant of love. In a way we can compare the potter is carefully shaping clay, the Holy Spirit is carefully and lovingly playing an essential role in guiding and refining the spiritual growth of spiritual seekers who are open and committed to enter into a faithful and trusting relationship with Christ.

The journey of one who is seeking a closer relationship with Christ, mirrors the stages of clay being transformed by the potter. Initially, the clay is formless, much like a person who may possess a semblance of faith but lacks the fullness of faith. This state is characterised by uncertainty, wavering trust, and an incomplete understanding of God's love and grace and what it means for them. It's at this point, the Holy Spirit begins to work quietly within, gently awakening a heartfelt desire for something more substantial.

As the potter takes the clay in a water moistened hand, the first step involves breaking it down, removing imperfections and air bubbles – another word could be deconstructed. This is similar to the Holy Spirit confronting the seeker and challenging them to look deeper into their fears and doubts. It's an uncomfortable process, often filled with resistance, but it's necessary for spiritual growth. In this humble breaking down, we have to understand our limitations and recognise the necessity of faith is to openly surrender ourselves to the Holy Spirit and allow the Holy Spirit to remold us, even transform us into something new.

The next stage is the kneading of the clay, where the potter skillfully works it, infusing it with strength and elasticity. Similarly, the Holy Spirit nurtures us as our faith grows, instilling within us resilience and flexibility so we can withstand the jibes, the doubts and fears. But there's more – this is a time when the scriptures become alive, prayer becomes a natural part of our day, and community becomes a source of support. It's during this time that those who want to know more begin to experience the richness of a relationship with Holy Spirit gives them. The doubt begins to subside, replaced by a hopeful longing to take a deep dive into God's Word and to understand God's purpose for them.

Once the clay is properly kneaded, the potter places it on the wheel, introducing the element of the circular movement made by the movement of the foot on the pedal. This is a crucial juncture in the journey, representing the time for the disciple to take a step out in faith, not actually fully knowing where or what direction they will be going. This is when many a time what the potter is making all goes 'pear shaped!' That's the step of faith! Here the Holy Spirit spins us (disciples) shaping our lives in ways we

may not ever have imagined and may not yet comprehend. The wheel's constant circular motion symbolises the ups and downs we experience as we move through life – our joys and challenges that refine our individual characters. In this transformative process, we encourage and support those whose journeys are new to trust the hands of the potter, allowing a deeper work to take place. As God's purpose for all our lives becomes clearer, our faith is strengthened as the clay begins to take shape.

The potter's hands continue to mold the clay into a beautiful vessel, and likewise, the Holy Spirit intricately designs the lives of those who have chosen to follow in His footsteps. This stage is marked by an emerging sense of identity and purpose as we intentionally look beyond ourselves, looking instead into finding ways of how we can best serve others in humility and grace in the same way as Christ has shown us. The once half-hearted seeker of faith is blossoming into a vibrant belief characterised by love, joy, peace, compassion, and a commitment to living out God's command of peace and love. The vessel is no longer one to just be admired for its beauty, it is functional, designed to carry beauty through God's love and grace – it serves a purpose. This is the stage when the potter adds the pigments, the 'extra decorative pieces'. This is the stage where it's an individual piece – unlike any other.

This now beautifully crafted vessel is subjected to fire in the kiln, a necessary process for durability and strength. The spiritual equivalent represents trials and tribulations that challenge faith, producing perseverance and character. It's through these fiery trials that we call on the Holy Spirit to protect our faith, enabling us to stand up to whatever hurdle it is that we have to overcome. We can look at each challenge that has come before us which we haven't let overcome our faith as a testament to God's love and grace, as an expression of the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

I finish today, with the journey from being a seeker to one who is sure of their relationship with Christ as being like the process of undergoing a piece of clay in the potter's hands. The Holy Spirit, like the potter, seeks to bring about a masterpiece, shaping lives into something of beauty and value. As we allow the potter to work within us, surrendering to God's guidance and love, trusting God to shape and reform us, and beautify us as individuals, we allow ourselves the privilege to transition from who we once were, to a life now deeply and firmly upheld by our unchallengeable faith. A faith which reflects the glory of God in every single area of our lives – we can't hide from God even if we wanted to. The clay, which was once formless, is now a vessel rich, vibrant, and brimming with purpose, fulfilling its divine calling. If you are having a tough time with doubt and fear, may I encourage to give yourself a red-hot go and move from seeking to know more, to taking the required action to know more.

'Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand,'

I hope you can hear as clearly as I can God's ability to form, reshape, and work with God's people, much like a potter shapes clay into a new vessel as needed and reshapes when needed.

Amen.