



SERMON - Trinity3 Evening - **Objects of God's Mercy in the Potters Hands!**

Looking at last week's reading from Paul's letter to the Roman Church and at that for tonight I find myself wondering whether the place Paul was living might have been next door to a Potter's Workshop? Paul, as we know, had a trade - that of 'Tent Maker' so it is possible that he might indeed seek out a place in and amongst the manufacturing centre of the city, where there might be Tent-Makers, Potters, Bakers, Joiner's shops and so on, where Paul could have space to carry out his own trade with which to raise the funds to keep himself and his companions, as we know he did wherever he went.

Recently we were thinking about how God has placed in the 'Jars of Clay' of our own selves the amazing treasure of His Salvation. Now Paul looks again to the Potter as the Artisan takes the clay and begins to shape it so that it conforms to what he wishes to make. Way, way back in the time of the Exodus we read that Aaron, whilst trying to explain himself out of responsibility for the making of the Golden Calf for the People of Israel to worship, tells Moses 'I took the gold that the People had given me and threw it all into the furnace and out of the fire came this calf! It was, of course, no miracle, but rather, the result of Aaron's design and will that the calf was formed from the gold. So it is with the Potter, that the clay is shaped according to the will of the artisan, who knows exactly what he desires to be the end result.

Sometimes the outcome is perhaps a wonderfully formed and beautiful serving dish for a Royal Feast, but on another occasion the result is a 'Guzzunder' - you know! - A Chamber-Pot! - because it 'Guzzunder the bed at night!' Both products conform to the will of the Potter and both also fulfil their role to perfection! If it doesn't conform and is spoiled for some reason as the potter labours at the wheel, perhaps using that long rope of clay to build up the shape and then smooth down the surfaces to a perfectly flat finish, then the spoiled clay pot, as yet unfired, is removed from the wheel and the clay - the same clay - used to form either the same pot or perhaps another item, according to the Potter's will! Early recycling of waste materials!

With this illustration of the work of a Potter, Paul tells us, his Readers, about how God works with us in our lives. Paul has just been talking, as you may remember from last week's reading, about God's dealings with the Old Testament characters, Isaac & Ishmael and Jacob and Esau. With them God may

seem to be acting entirely arbitrarily, choosing one character over the other, even when logic might work otherwise. Ismael was Abraham's eldest son and so should have been the one through whom God worked out his purposes or choosing that twister and deceiver, Jacob over the eldest son, Esau. who again was the eldest son and so should have received both his Father's Blessing and his inheritance - a double share of all that Isaac, his father had! Paul asks, 'is God therefore to be seen as being unjust!' and Paul is quite certain that God is not unjust, but that he has the right to deal with our wayward race as He sees fit and for His own purposes, just as the Potter has the freedom to make what he will from the clay in his hands, and even to destroy and remake with the self same clay,

But those who Paul is imagining this conversation with may respond that God is not fair, with the implication that this is so especially with them! They feel that quite unjustly, that God, having forgiven some, still holds others, (i.e. themselves!), accountable for their sin! Worse than that, the implication is that those who feel like this may be Jews, and who therefore think that as God's people they should be first in the forgiveness queue and not made to wait whilst other, non-Jewish (Romans and Greeks even) were ahead in the Queue.

Paul's answer might appear at first glance to be very negative! 'God can do as He pleases! After all, He is God!' He made us and He can remake us if and when He sees fit. We can no more question God about this than the clay can in the Potter's hands! So if God forgives you then all well and good, but if not... hard luck - that is how God works!

Except that that is not quite what Paul is saying! - In fact, that is not at all what Paul is telling us as we read these words!

Now last week we did learn how God's dealings with His People in days gone was often with only a small part of that Nation of families that was and is Israel. When the vast majority had gone their own ways, chasing after other gods or looking for aid and military assistance from the likes of Egypt, Jehovah had always kept a remnant in His plan and worked out through them His grand plan of Salvation! And yes, Jeremiah's God did tell that Prophet not to pray for Israel or Judah, and not to pester God about those who were going away from His will for them, but as we know from the rest of the story of the Old Testament, God always brought a few back to the land from which they had been taken or had fled and He always kept safe a few of His Priests and Prophets to enable worship and to speak His word.

And that is Paul's point! He does not wish his readers to dwell on the downside of this message - that we can do nothing to change God's mind or to make Him help us - but rather, Paul wants us to be encouraged by the very fact that God might - even that He wants and wishes and longs to - He might forgive, and He might restore those both of His People and also (and more to the point for Paul's Gentile Readers), - bring those who 'Are not my People' and make them very much His People, and those who are unloved, God longs to call 'Beloved'

The wonder, for Paul, is always not that God rejects some, but that God restores others and even accepts back those, like Saul/Paul, who had deliberately gone far from Him. To Paul, and to us in turn, the wonder is not that so many are left outside the Kingdom (Usually - invariably even, because they have taken themselves out of God's care!) but rather that sinners like himself, and like you and me, are welcomed, through His Son, to be counted as His for ever!

'What shall separate us from the Love of God?' Paul asks elsewhere? Well, you might say to yourself 'Actually there is a lot that separates me from God's Love, and quite justifiably so, - but, with Paul, we can reply -

'Nothing can separate us from the Love of God - nothing in or under the Earth and nothing in or above the Heavens! Not even, if we are prepared to turn to Him and claim the Blood of Jesus as Propitiation for our sin, - then not even our own sinful nature!

'Just to be clay in the Potter's hands,...' allowing - letting Him remake and restore us in the image of His Son, no longer vessels of shame, but made beautiful for Him as we are shaped in His Nail-Scarred Hands!

AMEN

Only To Be What He Wants Me To Be
Every Moment Of Every Day.
Yielded Completely To Jesus Alone,
Every Step Of This Pilgrim Way.

Just To Be Clay In The Potter's Hand,
Ready To Do What His Word Commands.
Only To Be What He Wants Me To Be,
Every Moment Of Every Day.