

Swedenborgian Sunday School Notes for the Revised Common Lectionary Jeremiah 18:1–11 • The Parable of the Potter

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Jeremiah 18:1–11 The Parable of the Potter

Psalms 139:1–6, 13–18 God knows us fully

Overview

Jeremiah's parable of the Potter and the Clay gives us a vivid image of our relationship with God, and the purpose of our life on earth: the re-formation of ourselves in the loving and wise image of God. Through this parable, children of all ages can understand that God creates us, God loves us, and God wants us to reshape our lives through faith and kindness.

Key Points

- The Lord created us all, and made each of us to be the special person that we are.
- The Lord loves us and cares for us every day.
- We all have our faults. The Lord wants to work with us to overcome them so that we can be kind and understanding people.

Example for Teaching Children

How many of you like to make things out of clay or play dough? What are some of the things you've made? (*Let the children talk about their sculptures.*)

What if you have an idea for making something really neat, and you get it all done, but it doesn't look right. Do you throw it away? (*Pause for responses.*) With clay, you can mush it up and start over again.

Was it a waste of time to make the first one? (*Allow time for discussion.*) Each time we try something, we learn more about what does and doesn't work. The time we spend trying it over and over again isn't wasted—we are getting better and better!

That's exactly what our Bible story is about. (*Read Jeremiah 18:1–6.*) Why do you think the Lord told Jeremiah to go watch the potter making pots on the wheel? (*Pause for the children's ideas, and let the discussion flow from them.*)

We can make things out of clay like the potter in the story, but we can also be *spiritual* potters. Do you know what it means to be a spiritual potter? When we decide what kind of a person we want to be, we are "shaping" ourselves for heaven or hell. For example, if our sister or brother or friend says something that bothers us, how can we shape ourselves by the way we react? (*Discuss how good and bad reactions and choices shape who we are as a person.*)

We all have our faults, and we all make mistakes. We are like the "marred vessel" in the story. But there is another Potter who can help us with that. Who do you think it is? Yes! The Lord made us each to be a good and special person—and the Lord can help us when we realize that we are saying and doing things that are wrong. If we listen to what the Lord teaches us, and make sure to *live* by it, we can become beautiful vessels carrying love and kindness to each other.

Basic Correspondences

clay = a person who is becoming a Christian

clay = the goodness of faith

potter = the Lord creating and forming us

potter = people when we shape ourselves

marred = having mistaken and false ideas

reshaping = God re-forming us in the divine image

Thoughts from Swedenborg

"Clay" stands for a Christian who is being formed, so it also stands for the goodness of faith through which we are formed—or reformed. . . .

Since the good of kindness and the true ideas in our faith are used in forming our religion, and "clay" and "the potter's vessel" stand for this type of goodness and truth, the prophet was commanded to go to the potter's house. . . . We are re-formed through the goodness of faith, which is meant by "clay."

Arcana Coelestia #6669

When a human being forms a vessel, it is a false idea; but when the *Lord* forms a vessel in us, it is a true idea. So in the Bible, "a potter's vessel" means either something false or something true, and the "potter" stands for the one who does the forming.

Apocalypse Explained #177.5

If we want to be set free, we have to recognize our faults and regret them. We recognize our faults when we learn what sorts of things are wrong, see them in ourselves, admit them, take responsibility for them, and criticize ourselves for them. When we do this in front of God, we are recognizing our faults. We regret our faults when, once we have admitted them and asked with a humble heart for help in giving them up, we stop acting on them and start living a new life in harmony with the rules of kindness and faith.

The Heavenly City #159–161