

## Jeremiah 18:1-12

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord. Go down to the potter's house and there I will give you my message. So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands, so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the word of the Lord came to me, 'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?' declares the Lord. 'Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will repent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it. Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, 'This is what the Lord says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions. But they will reply, "It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart.'

**By Your Shaping** 352

Janet Wootton, 1952- Janet Wootton, 1952-

Canon Bm F#m Bm F#m Bm F#m Bm F#m

1. By Your shap - ing, by Your wis - dom and de - light,

2.

3. we are craft - ed in Your im - age, deep lov - ing God.

4.

Bm F#m Bm F#m Bm F#m Bm

By Your *look at palms of hands*  
 shaping *look at backs of hands*  
 by Your wisdom *touch both hands to forehead, head bowed down*  
 and delight *raise head, raise hands to heaven, slightly apart*  
 we are crafted *hug yourself, and sensuously run hands*  
 in Your image *down both sides of body*  
 deep loving God *raise hands to heart*

Prayer. Spirit of Loving faithfulness, with grateful hearts we rest in your hands. Spirit of Goodness, thank you for redeeming us as a loving people of God. Amen.

## "Covenant"

*'We the members of The First Church of West Bridgewater united by the love of one another and guided by the teachings of Jesus . . . '*

Two teachings from Jesus on love come to us as relationship mandates. 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength' is the first and greatest commandment. The second, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' is like it. In gospel speak this means that there is no relationship in life, law, or eternity greater than these. In his commentary on the first relationship biblical scholar Marcus Borg wrote: 'You can keep the commandments and still be a jerk. But you cannot be in relationship with the loving God, without being continually transformed by 'God, the Great, 'I AM' which means, to be what the future demands. Rev. Ron Buford explained: 'Our God is not a God of outmoded rules and laws, keeping people separated---people do that. By contrast, the rule of God's living love is to always take another look and see the relationship with each other and God as primary. If you want to know where God is, Jesus says, look to where the Love of God bends toward making the life of each person as wonderful as God wants life to be for us in light of the present. As covenantal members of this church we promise to bend together in this present light of Holy Love.

In the prophet Jeremiah's time the nation states of Judah and Israel and the Jerusalem Jews had broken covenant by making primary relationships with evil-doing peoples. Jeremiah said— Not on my watch!---and went down to the potters house in order to receive a message about how God softens stubborn evil in good hearts. 'Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand,' said the Lord. As he watched the potter work and rework the clay into a piece that pleased its creator, Jeremiah's trust in faith's deep peace grew. Because he believed, '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' is the relationship changing love hymn we now sing.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that human beings have a terrible track record when it comes to making primary relationships with evil doing people and with stubbornness of evil in our own hearts. In Hans Deutsch's generation, Germans were hailing Adolf Hitler and church goers were joining the Nazi extermination team. That was the bad news. The good news was that when they got stuck in a situation of wicked unfaithfulness God remained faithful in the Potter's work of redeeming humanity with Loving hands. 'For the prophet Hans, God's redeeming took action when he started drawing critical cartoons of Adolf Hitler while he was living in Paris during the 1930's. It continued when the Nazi invaded Paris in 1940, he abandoned all he had and fled to the South of France, then to Spain, and finally, with an altered passport, into Portugal. There, he met the Reverend Charles Joy, executive director of the Unitarian Service Committee. The Service Committee was new, founded in Boston to assist Eastern Europeans, among them Unitarians as well as Jews, who needed to escape Nazi persecution. From his Lisbon headquarters, Joy oversaw a secret network of couriers and agents. Deutsch was most impressed and soon was working for the USC. He later wrote to Joy: "There is something that urges me to tell you . . . how much I admire your utter self denial and readiness to serve, to sacrifice all, your time, your health, your well being, to help, help, help" (taken from 'The Flaming Chalice).

In 'The Flaming Chalice' author Daniel D. Hotchkiss took up the Holy Spirit's redemptive story from there. 'The USC was an unknown organization in 1941. This was a disadvantage in war time, when establishing trust quickly across barriers of language, nationality, and faith could mean life instead of death. Disguises, signs and countersigns, and midnight runs across guarded borders were the means of freedom in those days. Joy asked Deutsch to create a symbol for the USC's papers 'to make them look official, to give dignity and importance to them, and at the same time to symbolize the spirit of USC work . . . When a document may keep a man out of jail, give him standing with governments and police, it is important that it look important.' Thus, Hans Deutsch made his lasting contribution to the USC and, as it turned out, to Unitarian Universalism. With pencil and ink he drew a chalice with a flame. It was, Joy wrote his board in Boston. . . 'a chalice with a flame, the kind of chalice which the Greeks and Romans put on their altars. The holy oil burning in it is a symbol of helpfulness and sacrifice . . . This was in the mind of the

artist. The fact, however, that it remotely suggests a cross was not in his mind, but to me this also has its merit. We do not limit our work to Christians. Indeed, at the present moment, our work is nine-tenths for the Jews, yet we do stem from the Christian tradition, and the cross does symbolize Christianity and its central theme of sacrificial love.' The flaming chalice design was made into a seal for papers and a badge for agents moving refugees to freedom. In time it became a symbol of Unitarian Universalism all around the world."

Several years back, First Church Potter, Donna Jones potted a chalice which we now light in worship to open our hearts and minds to God. Our chalice is a beautiful reminder of our faith that we are clay in the Potter's hand. It also reminds us of the active 'no' saying we must do against partnering with evil in the world. Today we celebrate our faith history of transforming evil with Holy love. In his reflection on the Unitarian Flaming Chalice symbol, Hotchkiss gets us thinking about the many ways in which we have made good on our covenant to look where the



Love of God bends toward making life wonder-ful.

He wrote: The flaming chalice combines two archetypes---a drinking vessel and a flame---and as a religious symbol had different meanings to different beholders. Chalices, cups, and flagons can be found worldwide on ancient manuscripts and altars. The chalice used by Jesus at his last Passover seder became the Holy Grail sought by the knights of Wales and England. Jan Hus, Czech priest and forerunner of the Reformation, was burned at the stake for proposing, among other things, that the communion chalice be shared with the laity. Feminist writer Riane Eisler has used the chalice as a symbol of the "partnership way" of being in community. Sharing, generosity, sustenance, and love are some the meanings symbolized by a chalice. As a sacrificial fire, flame has been a central symbol for the world's oldest scriptures, the Vedic hymns of India. Today, lights shine on Christmas and Hanukkah, Duvali and Swanzaa; eternal flames stand watch at monuments and tombs; and candles flicker in cathedrals, temples, mosques, and meeting houses. A flame can symbolize witness, sacrifice, testing, courage, and illumination.