

September 4, Ordinary 23C (Jeremiah 18:1-11)

There is nothing markedly sacred about the potter's house.

by [Charisse R. Tucker](#) in the [September 2022](#) issue

“Charisse, come here.” It was a common phrase in my household when I was growing up. I was prone to sequester myself in some nook where I could focus on my book or daydream my way into other worlds in peace.

“Yes, Mommy?” I would reply. It was part peace offering, part negotiation. I wanted to indicate that I heard her and knew I owed her my attention; I also hoped to have the conversation from my spot without having to peel myself away. But if she insisted, I would have to go to her to find out what she wanted.

Often it was, “I thought I asked you to wash the dishes.” (I still hate washing dishes.) But sometimes she just wanted to show me something she knew I would find exciting. There wasn't a science to discerning the nature of the request. I just had to make the adjustment to go to her, to the place from which she called, to find out what she wanted me to see or hear.

Such childhood moments washed over me as I thought about Jeremiah's instruction from God to “come, go down to the potter's house . . . [to] hear my words.” Though I have read this scripture many times, I don't know that this element ever struck me this way before. God says, in essence, “Come here and come hear.”

I'm curious about this question of location and God's speaking, especially given the last two and a half years and the forced separation many have experienced from our communal places of worship. We are accustomed to gathering in these sacred spaces, where we are led in song by our sanctioned choir or band, are prayed for by the elder or deacon on duty, and hear a word from the pastor or someone the pastor has authorized. Throughout it all we wait to hear a word from the Lord in the place where God has spoken before. So when safety measures forced us from our sanctuaries, we had to contend with the fact that we depend not only on the voice of

God but also on its customary location and context.

Now, in this time of global fascination with the idea of a return to normal, this text is both reminder and encouragement: God's speaking happens wherever God chooses to speak and through whatever means God desires. There is nothing markedly sacred about the potter's house. The potter is an artisan whose craft is for common use. Yet it is the potter in his dusty, clay-filled workshop, working away on his wheel, whom God uses as the entry point for God's revelation to emerge.

Can we open ourselves up to the idea that there is truly no place, no person, no situation through which God is unable to speak? How different does a playground or post office or dog park look to us if we consider it all holy ground? How would our tender conversations with loved ones, play-time with our children, care for our elders, or even difficult exchanges with friend or foe change if we were open to God's presence in those moments? Can we re-familiarize ourselves with the kind of childlike wonder that sees messages in the clouds and prophetic insight in places other than sanctuaries, from people who aren't necessarily wearing holy garments?

Such questions require loosening our grip on our traditional distinctions between sacred and secular. They also call for us to be willing to hear God on God's terms.

We can and should and will continue to gather in traditionally recognized communal spaces. We will strain our ears and heart to hear what the Ancient of Days has to say to our situation. We will sing the songs and pray the psalms that remind us of the continuation and complications of our faith. All of this is only right.

But we may also hear God call us by name to go somewhere less familiar, to leave our nooks and nesting places for a place where we can receive the sort of insight that can only be experienced when we let go of our comfort. Sure, we might be asked about why we've left things unattended, like dishes or the environment or the marginalized. Or maybe God, like my mom, is simply waiting to show us something we'll find exciting.