

## THE PAST AND THE PITCHER

*“Arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. Then the word of the LORD came to me: “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.”*

—JEREMIAH 18:2–6



In one of the books I read on grieving the loss of a child, the author suggested smashing a piece of pottery as a form of therapy. When I read that, I thought it was one of the dumbest things I had ever heard.

Then, not long after I read (and dismissed) the idea about smashing a piece of pottery, I was driving along, listening to my favorite worship CD, and talking to God. I try not to dwell on the past any more than I need to, because as with all of us, there are hurts that aren’t totally healed.

But, it was a sunny day and I was alone with my music, so I guess it was as good a time as any to remember. As it turns out, I'm glad I did.

Before I get to all that, let me start with my first image of Jesus.

At my grandparents' condo, there was an image of the Lord that hung by the fold-out couch my sister and I used to sleep on in the guest room. It was surrounded by photographs of my dead Italian family, mostly women who: a) looked like they should have slowed down on the lasagna servings, and b) decided collectively that whenever a camera was around, they would pretend they were really angry and stare at the lens. Right there, on the wall of Sicilian terror, hung the face of Christ.

It was one of those "watch you wherever you go" faces. I would wake up in the middle of the night and feel like He was staring at me. I actually devised an elaborate system that involved my sister and me taking shifts so neither of us would be caught unaware in the event that He or any of the dead ladies decided to make a midnight visit.

Let's just say it wasn't a great first impression.

Years later, two events occurred that shaped my life dramatically. The first was during graduate school. My dad called me one day and told me he had been diagnosed with cancer. They were going to do further testing, but things didn't look good. I remember the words *three months* being tossed around. I am a daddy's girl to say the least. Although I had no background with the church, or with the Lord, I decided to do something crazy.

I made a deal with God.

It went something like this: You heal him, and I will find out about You.

It sounds kind of crazy, but I was desperate. The closest thing to prayer I had up to that point was when I asked God in the fifth

grade to make my bowl haircut grow out while I slept. He failed me. I have pictures to prove it.

On Christmas Eve we got a phone call from the doctor. The tests had come back.

They couldn't find the cancer.

My family had always been Catholic, so when I got back to the city where I was attending grad school, I called the local Catholic church and asked them how to learn about God. It turned out they had classes for this kind of thing, and they were about to start (go figure). I went to classes for a year and got to know God a little better. I decided I needed to get rid of my boyfriend, whom I had dated for almost six years. He was abusive in every sense of the word, and there are a lot of deep wounds I still carry with me from that time period. It was a completely unhealthy relationship and one of those times I look back on and wish I could change. It hurts because even though I didn't have a relationship with God at the time, I feel like I was unfaithful to Him.

Fast-forward a few years. I was driving home from work and talking to my best friend on the phone. A woman was not paying attention and pulled out right in front of me. I slammed on my brakes but not fast enough to prevent my car from hitting her and rolling over. I remember the sound of glass breaking and a scream (I guess it was mine). I climbed through the window of my Grand Cherokee and cut my shoulder on the way out. It was the only injury I sustained.

I noticed the police officers who came to the scene of the accident were taking pictures of my car, now upside-down in a pool of glass. I asked them why, and they told me that based on the way the car had rolled, coupled with the fact that I wasn't wearing my seat belt, I should have been under the front wheel of the car. I didn't understand why that was interesting enough to photograph

until I looked at the car. There was only one item that had come out of the car as I flipped, and it was now pinned under the front wheel. It was the rosary that I had been given by the Church when I finished my classes, and it was covered in my blood. Not a single bead was broken. I knew in that moment what many people are blessed enough to learn early in life.

He died for me.

Later that night I went to the chapel with my best friend (after she came flying to the hospital with wet hair because she had heard the wreck happen while we were on the phone), and we cried together at His mercy. The door started to open for a relationship with Christ, but I didn't fully let Him in.

All of that was about to change. I had become friends with some Christians who were really trying to get me into the whole church world. They invited me on a retreat thing, and to be honest, I thought that pulling my arm hair out sounded like more fun, but I was desperate.

The theme of the retreat was grace. I walked by a room where the group leading worship was rehearsing, and I saw him. The man who became my husband. He loves this story, because I basically fell head-over-heels for him instantly. I have my journal entry from that day, and this is what I wrote:

*“Lord, I know I’m not good enough for him. But could you just let me have someone like him?”*

Almost eleven years and five kids later, I am a better person because God let me have him.

So, back to the pottery and the drive to the airport. As I was driving, God spoke to me clearly, and He asked me to do something odd. I started thinking about a certain pitcher I have in my house, and as soon as it came to mind, He told me to smash it. I

thought about that book that said to break a piece of pottery and how I had kind of shrugged it off, but I really felt like that's what God wanted me to do. Thankfully, my neighbors know me well enough to not call the police when I throw a perfectly good pitcher onto my front porch at ten o'clock at night. I watched it shatter, and I must apologize to the author of that book for my initial skepticism. It felt great.

I waited for a few moments, taking it in. What next? I asked.

Again, He was very clear.

*Put it back together again.*

What I wanted to do was go to bed, but I felt like He was meaning *now*, so I gathered all the pieces together and brought them in the house. I told Todd what was going on, and he took a look at the tiny shards of porcelain, knowing it was going to be a long night. I went and got the hot glue gun and sat down in the kitchen. It was hard to know where to start, but I found the lip and the handle relatively intact, and just kind of made it up as I went. I talked to the Lord while my fingers worked, and He stayed near to me. I would love to tell you that it was like a movie where everything about the moment was all sweet and perfect, but the truth is that I glued my finger to it at one point and cut myself several times. I thought about swear words that I wanted to say. But, still I kept at it.

And as I worked, He let me think about my past. Mistakes I have long regretted. I began to realize that this pitcher was my life, and every piece was part of a story that He had chosen to put together. I started crying, and remembering things I thought I had forgotten. It took a long time to finish, but it was time well spent. Every nook and cranny whispered to me, until at last it stood in all its imperfection.

*Here you are, Angie. You are mended. You are filled with My Spirit, and I am asking you to pour yourself out.*

The image of my life as a broken pitcher was beautiful to me, but at the same time, it was hard to look at all of the cracks. I ran my fingers along them and told Him I wished it had been different. I wished I had always loved Him, always obeyed Him, always sought Him the way I should. I was mad at the imperfections, years wasted, gaping holes where it should be smooth.

But God, my ever-gracious God, was gentle and yet convicting as He explained.

*My dearest Angie. How do you think the world has seen Me? If it wasn't for the cracks, I couldn't seep out the way I do. I chose the pitcher. I chose you, just as you are.*

At the risk of sounding like a nutcase, I am going to make a suggestion. Find a piece of pottery, and let it shatter at your feet. Then take the time to be with the Lord as you piece it together again (but beware the wrath of the glue gun!). Let Him tell you who you are, and let yourself be reminded of the grace that seals us all. You may not know Him at all, or you may be a “flannel-board Jesus” kid. It makes no difference. As I type these words I am praying that He will come to you and remind you that He loves the gaps because there is the potential for more of Himself to be revealed in you. Let Him help you smash and rebuild His most coveted possession . . . you.

## mending

– I’m willing to bet that you have seasons of your life that feel “unmendable.” Despite the heartache you have over the choices you have made, it’s never too late for Him to sculpt you into something beautiful. Consider a time when you were not walking with Him the way you would like to have been. What were the circumstances? How can you protect yourself from walking there again? Spend

some time today praying through your thought process as you look back. Allow the Lord to remind you that you aren't a mistake. I'm big on list making, so sometimes it helps me to write down things that made me susceptible to making bad choices. I have found that it doesn't normally happen out of nowhere, but is a combination of factors. The more I identify the factors, the easier it is to see when I'm starting to drift again.

– I want you to have a “pottery” experience of your own. Find a (preferably cheap!) piece of pottery that you can break. It can be a bowl, a vase, a pitcher, or anything that will give the same effect. I learned the hard way that it would have been easier to put it in a plastic bag before I dropped it (let's just say the kids had to wear shoes for several weeks on that porch to avoid wayward shards!). Break the pottery, and glue it back together. Take your time; it isn't a race. It's an opportunity for the Lord to speak to you, and for you to be reminded of His great love for you—His precious broken vessel.

– Whether here, in a journal, or on a Post-it note, write one word, thought, or prayer that came to mind as you read “The Past and the Pitcher.” Continue this with every entry throughout *Mended* and pray that God will remind you of what He showed you in these entries whenever you hear or think of those words as you go about life.