

## **“Finding Grace (When Everything Seems Shut Down and Cancelled)”**

by  
Andrew Kooman

**What** Every year, Jim’s daughter buys him a clay nativity figurine from a local sculptor as part of their yearly Christmas celebrations. But because of the pandemic and the shutdown that resulted, the sculptor closed shop and the tradition unexpectedly died. As Jim decorates the tree, everything seems different, as he asks for grace to be pliable clay in the Potter’s hand.

Themes: Christmas, Advent, Home, Grace, Monologue, Pandemic, Reader’s Theatre, COVID-19, Nativity, Gifts, Traditions

**Who** Actor- male or female mid-50’s

**When** Present

**Wear  
(Props)** Candle  
Candle lighter

**Why** Jeremiah 18:1-6

**How** **If you are acting the monologue on stage**, be imaginative and use the space to re-enact the actor’s experience laying on the floor and watching the Christmas tree.

**If you are reading for Zoom**, read it with passion and emotion, and don’t be afraid to take your time. Look in at the audience or into the computer camera. Ensure all your notifications are turned off and emails are closed and have the PDF on screen near the camera.

**If you read the script from the pulpit**, be familiar enough with your lines so that your head isn’t down in the script the entire time. Look audience members in the eye. Take time to pause and breathe. Embrace the awe and mystery of the scripture.

**Time** Approximately 3-4 minutes

*Actor enters and addresses the audience.*

**Actor:** Our daughter started a tradition years ago, of buying us a decoration made by a local sculptor who creates scenes of the nativity out of clay.

Whenever I look at our Christmas tree it's like I'm looking at every part of the Christmas story and the history of our family get-togethers, both at the same time.

I was staring at the Christmas tree the other night, squinting up at it from the floor.

And a question came to me. *Have I taken the shape you want me to take?*

These words fell into my exhausted mind from where I lay on the floor, after a long day.

You see, I used to say a prayer quite often, when I was younger. As the direction of my life wasn't quite so clear. When there were more years ahead of me than behind me.

I was in the habit of praying, "God, you are the Potter, and I am the clay—please shape me."

This was when I had yet to choose the path. The university I'd study at. The career I'd pursue. My spouse.

Don't worry, I'm no Scrooge bemoaning a Christmas past and all that could have been.

When I was looking at all those clay ornaments it triggered this memory of when I was unformed, ready to be made *into* something. Yet to be tested and strengthened through fire.

That prayer, over the years, became more of a declaration [*with passion*]: "I will take the shape my Father will have me take for He is the Potter and I am the clay!"

I believe it still. With all my heart.

But this lump—and let's be honest, *lumpy*—clay has been shaped. I live, act, walk in a certain way and have for years.

That hopeful, prayerful statement I declared when I was young, well, it was before this strange time we're all living in. Before our world ground to a halt and the virus hit. Before they sort of just shut down and cancelled everything in a way that's still impacting me and so many people I know.

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Like my daughter, who cried over the phone when she called to tell us that she won't be sending a little clay decoration this year because the sculptor couldn't reopen after the quarantine. So last year's little clay shepherd boy was the final one.

That prayer of faith I prayed all those years ago? Is it cancelled too? I prayed it before this cynical time, when politics and conversation weren't so angry and so toxic. Where you could have a civil chat with relatives from the other side of the country who vote for the other party at Thanksgiving. Remember that?

It seems that when I prayed that old prayer, it was in a much simpler or hopeful time.

*If the **Actor** is performing (and not reading) they can lie down on the floor to enact watching the tree.*

So, there I am, laying on the floor. The tree is decked out and twinkling, but it just didn't look the same. The feelings, the expectation I normally have at Christmas were not there.

Then I started looking around the living room, at all the things in it. Stuff gathered up over a lifetime. Furniture and bookshelves. Trinkets and souvenirs. Picture frames and coffee mugs and plant holders.

All these practical and decorative things. I had to chuckle. God, you've shaped me. Now God, please *use* me.

Sometimes at Christmas I just want to think about the baby in the manger. Some years I'm part of a choir or in the big church play.

This year I feel a bit more tired than usual and I'm not all that certain if we should have even put up the tree.

But whether I'm standing with my arms raised in worship or laying on the living room floor, I know that the God I serve is the God who both shapes me and uses me.

He's the God who cleans and polishes me. He repairs and restores me. He is the Potter and I am the clay.

And he holds me in his hand.

I don't know if we'll have a big dinner with the turkey and all the trimmings, or order pizza and eat on the couch this year.

But I do know that my God is the God who can fill this empty vessel with grace. A grace that isn't based on a feeling or on my circumstances. But

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on the very nature of who *He* is: a gracious God who gave His only Son to the world to save it from despair.

And so this year, I choose to light a candle at Advent to declare that God has filled the world, and my life, with grace.

*The Actor/Reader picks up a candle and lights it with a candle lighter.*

This Christmas, we ask you, God, to shape us into the shape you want us to take. Use us in the way you want to, God, and to fill us with your grace.

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