

September 4, 2022  
Jeremiah 18:1-11  
*"Like Clay"*



St. John United Church of Christ  
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL 397-6323  
Email - stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com  
Rev. Rosemary Captain

**THERE WILL NOT BE A BULLETIN NEXT WEEK.**

**PREVIEW OF TODAY'S SCRIPTURE LESSONS:**

In our First Testament reading today the message of the Lord to Jeremiah at the potter's house sets out

the alternatives for Israel; obedience and salvation or disobedience and judgment. Psalm 139 responds by reminding us of God's intimate knowledge of us. In the cluster of Jesus' sayings collected by Luke in today's Gospel text, the cost of discipleship and the need to calculate that cost thoughtfully are addressed.

**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

Like clay, we arrive at this time of worship:

**Shapeless and full of potential, we arrive.**

Like clay, we prepare for this time of worship:

**Stretched and twisted into formation, we prepare.**

Like clay, we enter this time of worship:

**Formed and ready for warmth, we enter.**

**\*INVOCATION:**

Loving Creator, maker of everything good, we are in your hands. Be with us now as we gather ourselves to seek your wisdom and strive to become the people you would have us be.

**\*UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

**Unlike clay, we actively resist the diverse ways you shape us into what the world needs. We frequently struggle to trust in your vision for who we could become. We anxiously avoid facing the heat that**

**protects and sustains us. We humbly confess to these and all our shortcomings.** *Silence*

**\*WORDS OF GRACE:**

God graciously chooses us despite our self-destructive ways. God repeatedly mends our broken places and unceasingly delivers us from harm toward wholeness. All thanks be to God!

**\*GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator,  
and the Christ and the Spirit so near.  
As it was from the start so it shall be forever,  
One God always here.**

(Repeat two more times.)

(end) **One God always here. One God always here.**

**FIRST TESTAMENT LESSON: Jeremiah 18:1-11**

**God the potter**

**18** Jeremiah received the LORD's word: <sup>2</sup> Go down to the potter's house, and I'll give you instructions about what to do there. <sup>3</sup> So I went down to the potter's house; he was working on the potter's wheel. <sup>4</sup> But the piece he was making was flawed while still in his hands, so the potter started on another, as seemed best to him. <sup>5</sup> Then the LORD's word came to me: <sup>6</sup> House of Israel, can't I deal with you like this potter, declares the LORD? Like clay in the

potter's hand, so are you in mine, house of Israel! <sup>7</sup> At any time I may announce that I will dig up, pull down, and destroy a nation or kingdom; <sup>8</sup> but if that nation I warned turns from its evil, then I'll relent and not carry out the harm I intended for it. <sup>9</sup> At the same time, I may announce that I will build and plant a nation or kingdom; <sup>10</sup> but if that nation displeases and disobeys me, then I'll relent and not carry out the good I intended for it. <sup>11</sup> Now say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem: This is what the LORD says: I am a potter preparing a disaster for you; I'm working out a plan against you. So each one of you, turn from your evil ways; reform your ways and your actions.

**\*GOSPEL: Luke 14:25-33**

**Discipleship's demands**

<sup>25</sup> Large crowds were traveling with Jesus. Turning to them, he said, <sup>26</sup> "Whoever comes to me and doesn't hate father and mother, spouse and children, and brothers and sisters—yes, even one's own life—cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup> Whoever doesn't carry their own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. <sup>28</sup> "If one of you wanted to build a tower, wouldn't you first sit down and calculate the cost, to determine whether you have enough money to complete it? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when you have laid the

foundation but couldn't finish the tower, all who see it will begin to belittle you. <sup>30</sup> They will say, 'Here's the person who began construction and couldn't complete it!' <sup>31</sup> Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down to consider whether his ten thousand soldiers could go up against the twenty thousand coming against him? <sup>32</sup> And if he didn't think he could win, he would send a representative to discuss terms of peace while his enemy was still a long way off. <sup>33</sup> In the same way, none of you who are unwilling to give up all of your possessions can be my disciple.

This is what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

**Thanks be to God.**

**MESSAGE: "Where does this parade end up?"**

When Jesus said these things in Luke 14, he was on the road to Jerusalem. He knew that he was on his way to the cross; the crowds who were with him thought that he was on his way to an empire. That's why he spoke to them like this. In the most vivid way possible he told them that those who followed him were not on the way to worldly power and glory, but must be ready for a loyalty which would sacrifice the dearest things in life and for a suffering which would be like the agony of a man upon a cross.

We should NOT take his words with cold and unimaginative literalness. The language of the middle east is always as vivid as the human mind can make it. When Jesus tells us to hate our nearest and dearest, he does NOT mean that literally. He means that no love in life can compare with the love we must bring to him.

There are two suggestive truths within this passage. 1.) It IS possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple; (student). It is possible to be a camp-follower without being a soldier of the king; to be a hanger-on in some great work without pulling one's weight. We can sit in a lecture hall and NOT be a student. It's one of the supreme handicaps of the church that in it there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples.

2.) It is a Christian's first duty to count the cost of following Christ. The tower which the man was going to build was probably a vineyard tower from which watch was kept against thieves.

In every sphere of life each of us is called upon to count the cost. In a marriage ceremony you might hear "marriage is not to be entered upon lightly or unadvisedly, but thoughtfully, reverently, and in the fear of God. A man and woman must count the cost.

That's also true with the Christian way. Are we willing to do anything God asks us to do? Are we

willing to give up an only day off to help build a house for a homeless person? Or to cook supper for a shelter.

But if we are daunted by the high demands of Christ let us remember that we are not left to fulfill them alone. He who called us to the steep road will walk with us every step of the way and be there at the end of the parade to meet us. Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:** Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer.

All-knowing God, your wisdom is beyond our reach. We are thankful that you have accommodated yourself to our limited capacity in the sending of your Son into the world. We are glad for the knowledge of you that we have through Jesus of Nazareth, his life, his teaching, his healing ministry. We appreciate the patience of the Spirit who continues to teach us as we are willing to be taught, through experience and the shared wisdom of others in talking, in reading, in listening to Biblical scholars.

God of diversity, teach us tolerance and adaptability that we may live comfortably with the disabled, the exceptional, the brilliant, the challenged, the bored, the violent, and all who are misplaced, misunderstood, and misinterpreted. Give

help to those who are charged with finding ways for us to live together in community.

Let your love, O Christ, surround the sick, the troubled, the bereaved, the lonely, the abandoned. We lift up all those on our prayer list. May they feel your presence.

As we are confident of this presence for all of us, let us pray together . . .

#### **THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

#### **INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:**

The cost of discipleship is bold and radical. It requires a countercultural giving of possessions and self. Let us risk the safety of ordinary and choose to build with God by sharing our tithes, offerings, and our very selves.

#### **\*UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING:**

**Some bear crosses hollowed out by hunger, some carry crosses called injustice. Sometimes our abundance is a cross which we struggle to bear. But as we learn to follow you, as we seek to be as generous as you, we discover that we can gift others with hope, with grace, and with peace. Receive our offerings this day, so they might bless your children**

**in every way imaginable. This we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

**\*HOLY COMMUNION:**

**Great Prayer of Thanksgiving**

The Potter of life be with you.

**And also with you.**

People of God, lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the One who reshapes them into grace.**

People of God, give thanks to the Lord our God.

**We praise the One who has shaped us for love and service.**

With joy we praise you, Creating God.

You stooped down and took the clay lying on earth's floor, shaping us in your image. but we wondered what it would be like to follow our own paths  
and detached ourselves from your side.

We counted the cost of being your children,  
and found it to be too much for us.

We pondered your words and found them useless for our lives, but you did not take your hands from us, but continue to recreate us, to reshape us, to redeem us.

Giver of breath, shaper of words, all the living find voice to praise you, as we celebrate with the people

of every time and place, speaking to your glory:

**Holy, holy, holy are you, God who shapes us  
with hands of grace and hope.**

**Your wonder works of creation praise your name.**

**Hosanna in the highest!**

**Blessed is the One who comes,**

**appealing to us on the basis of love.**

**Hosanna in the highest!**

Holy are you, Redeeming God, and blessed is Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Traveling with us, he points out the paths

we are to walk. When he could command us to do whatever he wants, he appeals to us to follow his example. Whatever wrong we have done,

whatever good we have failed to do,

Christ charges them to his account, that we might be counted as your beloved children.

So, as we come to the Table of grace and hope, we remember that mystery we call faith:

**Christ died, having counted the cost.**

**Christ was raised, the foundation of resurrection being set in place.**

**Christ will come, refreshing our hearts for all eternity.**

Spirit of the Living God, renew us with this bread and this cup which have been set aside for sacred us,

even as you refresh our hearts.

Fill us with all the goodness of the kingdom, that we may do good for Christ as we serve others:

in the ways in which we treat our families;

in our willingness to draw

the outcast to our side;

in our efforts to be your healing hands

to the sick and grieving.

Then, here at the Table and beyond;

here in this moment, and through eternity:

remind us that we are always with you,

God of all places and times,

Christ of those who suffer,

Spirit of justice and hope:

God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.

#### **SHARING THE ELEMENTS:**

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:** Almighty God, we give you thanks for the gift of our Savior's presence in the simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. Unite us with all who are fed by Christ's body and blood that we may faithfully proclaim the good news of your love and that your universal church may be a rainbow of hope in an uncertain world; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

#### **\*BENEDICTION:**

Before your birth, you were wonderfully and fearfully formed. Like clay, may God continue to reform and reshape you into your truest self, now and every day after. Amen.

**PRAYER LIST:** Urban Baum, David Seneczyn, Warren Neff, Carol White, Cheri Schutzenhofer, Theo Mally, Jane Riess, Betty Massey, Gary Whitkas, Sandy Fort, Ingrid Alexiou, Becky Ballard, Peggy and her family (friends of Judy Schmitt,) Rosemary Williams, Bob Puckett, Mary (friend of Nancy's), Jackie Canterbury, Ron Bopp.