

Sermon: What God Wants from Us Part II

Scripture: Jeremiah 18:1-11; Luke 14: 25-33

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First Scripture Reading

Our Old Testament reading comes from Jeremiah 18:1-11. Jeremiah is one of the major prophets of the Hebrew Bible who witnessed the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's Temple, for he was the mouthpiece of God to prophesy the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Prior to the exile, this is Jeremiah's account of Jeremiah watching a potter work with clay, which then provides an analogy to explore God's relationship with God's people. Hear now God's holy and creative Word.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ² "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." ³ So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. ⁴ The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

⁵ Then the word of the Lord came to me: ⁶ Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. ⁷ At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, ⁸ but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. ⁹ And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, ¹⁰ but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. ¹¹ Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the Lord: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you, from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

Amen.

Our gospel reading continues from last week, looking at the 14th chapter of Luke, verses 25-33. As we saw how Jesus was compelled to share his radical love with the leader of the Pharisees, in today's passage, Jesus addresses the crowds who were traveling with him what it means to follow him and to act out the radical love. Hear how God's holy Word.

²⁵ Now large crowds were traveling with him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Let us pray. Dear holy and loving God, who’s love is too deep and wide to measure, thank you for being for us and being with us each moment of our lives. As we come to seek your truth together about what it means to be a Christ followers this morning, be merciful and shed your marvelous light upon us that we may feel the loving embrace through your Words. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

We are continuing our quest of looking at Luke chapter 14 and asking the fundamental question, what does God want from us? It is a polite way of asking, ‘what is required of us?’ as we know that the Bible tells us, “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required, and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”¹ If last week’s passage told us that we cannot simply turn on and off the acting out God’s radical love in our lives, this week Jesus is asking of us to be content of being a second in our lives.

It seems that in modern days many Christians treat God much like an insurance agent. Whenever a bad thing takes place or a person has done wrong in the eyes of others, we call on God to fix it. Of course, like many of us, we try to fix the problem ourselves before calling on God with our versions of duct tape, superglue, or whatever means we can try to patch things together before knowing that we must pay a deductible and approach God with humility. Then we ask to be placed on a forgiveness plan to wipe away our record of wrongdoings, so that we can be rewarded once again for doing the right things and our premiums be lowered, thinking by doing the right things or more realistically not get caught

¹ Luke 12:48

doing the wrong things in front of others, the less of sacrifice in our lives and do less charitable things.

Insurance companies also borrow many of the God's qualities in their slogans to make a pitch. State farm knows that *Like a good neighbor*, God is always there for us. Allstate wants us to know that *You're in Good Hands* as we trust in the Lord. Prudential asks us to *Let God be your rock*.

With all jokes aside, God has been truly a shelter for all of us and for many generations. We want Jesus to forgive us, love us, and accept us for who we are, but what if I told you that this statement is a modern twist of what Christian's believed and hold dear for so long. I firmly believe that if our spiritual forefathers were only interested and concerned about themselves, being forgiven, loved and accepted by God, I would not be standing before you today. You see, today's passages are both beautiful in its imagery, simple in understanding, and yet It is difficult to accept and to live out in our lives for they are a call to us to give everything that we are to the Lord, to relinquish our control, and to be satisfied being second in everything. Many knew and heeded the warnings signs of Jesus as described in Luke 14 into their heart yet, lived missional lives of sacrifice and living for one another, daring to share the love of Christ to the ends of the earth. Incredible men and women of faith carried their faith, sailed across the sea, and landed on a shore of a distant land one that was known as a hermit kingdom in the late 19th century. The missional initiative of those Christians created a fervor that passed through generations, and here I stand as the fruit of their willingness to be molded and to be used as God's hands.

It didn't only take place abroad. The missional work of sharing God's love by giving one to the fullest was among us and was exemplified by many of Christian brothers and sisters not too long ago. In fact, some of you lived it and witnessed it with your very own eyes. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Christianity has always insisted that the cross we bear precedes the crown we wear. To be a Christian one must take up his cross, with all its difficulties and agonizing and tension-packed content, and carry it until that very cross leaves its mark upon us."² In other words, we have to carry our cross and daily pick it up so that we have a print of carrying our cross on our souls, on our bodies, on our faith.

I do not think today's Luke passage is to be taken literally and to hate the family members, as it goes against everything that Jesus speaks of. Jesus spoke of the radical love that loves everyone, including one's enemies. The way I interpret today's passage is like a comparison, and it is also there to show that God is also a jealous God. God wants us to love God so much, that there would not be anything that can compare our love for God to anything else. The deepest love we should have in our lives – love for our parents, love for our families, and love for ourselves – cannot measure up to the love that we should have for God – in fact that it cannot even register in the scale of God's love. Isn't it what we want from the person we love the most? There is no other desire from whom we love other

² Pg. 25, Soul Survivor

than that they would return our love and prioritize them above all? God who created the universe desires our love in a same way.

When we reorganize our priorities and place God above all else, including parents, family, and my own self, then our lives will automatically transform into what I would like to call “a missional living,” that carries out the gospel and love of God to the ends of the earth, making a difference in other people’s lives. Sometimes it means planting a seed of faith that we will not be able to witness for years to come. Yet, one day may become the tree that others will rest and benefit from, as I have benefited from.

As we live out our missional lives, it also means that we are second in our lives, as we love God first, who first loved us, and to be content of who we are in God’s care as not the one in charge, but as a second. That means be open to be molded to be used by God, always looking for an opportunity to make a difference in someone else’s life, to be an encouragement, to be an ear to hear the worries and heartaches of another, or sometimes it means to be a shoulder for someone else to cry on. It also means we need to be present in the times of celebration of others as well.

Friends, to summarize, God does not want to be our back up plan, like an insurance agent or insurance plan. God wants us to be a proactive partner in bringing God’s kingdom. God wants us to make God a priority in our lives, like any lover would. With our time, our thoughts, our actions, and deeds, God wants us to be the one that gets most of it, if not all. By placing God first, we will become a missional minded people, to bring God’s justice into the world by serving one another, to let us experience a piece of heaven here on earth with fellow brothers and sisters. So let us labor on. When the world rests, let us share God’s love with a purpose and mission in our lives. Let us be the source of hope, kindness, and love that the world has not yet seen. In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.