

“The Call to Change HURTS!”

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September 4, 2016

Scripture (NRSV):

Jeremiah 18:1-11

1 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.

Luke 14:25-28

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?"

Sermon:

Ouch! These texts are kinda tough!

O sure, Jesus is using hyperbole in this speech, he is consciously exaggerating and overemphasizing, but still!

Even if we don't believe he is literally asking us to "hate" our families, even if we don't believe he is asking us to "hate" our lives, he is using strong imagery.

His is a very challenging message about our loyalties and our priorities! Speaking to the

people who follow him, whether it is 2,000 years ago, or today, Jesus is and always will be a challenging teacher.

He wants to emphasize to them, and to us, that the path of full life, the path of building the new world of God-design and intention, the world that he called “the kingdom of God” was not possible without focus, determination, a life of attention, a life of challenge.

He most certainly wanted us to realize that you could no more put in a half-hearted effort in kingdom building, than you could in house building! You can’t build half a house and call it complete, move in and live there.

You can’t be vague and wishy washy in being a Jesus follower and believe that the world will change for the better, unless you commit to it.

Early in the new year, just months ago, all of you who claim this place as your church home, voted on some really important issues.

We voted to stay here at the corner of 4th and Washington, rather than leave this building and find a new location.

And

We voted to open up our restricted funds and make some necessary changes and upgrades to our building and prepare for changes in how we use our building, share our building and serve the good of Spokane through this building.

This we cannot do, without rethinking how we will be church. We aren’t just going to change the bathrooms, or add solar power to our roof. I believe we can expect to change in more significant ways...as we open our doors and our lives more and more, we will be changed.

And when that happens, well, sometimes at least, it hurts! Sometimes it is awkward and uncomfortable and tiring. Sometimes we will make mistakes, hurt each other’s feelings, be annoyed or offended. In fact, we are sure to do that!

I find comfort in watching my granddaughters! Just about everything they do, they do with lots of mistakes. They try to feed themselves, and food goes everywhere. They try to walk, and they fall on their faces. They try to climb the stairs and they fall down them.

But that has not stopped either of them from trying again, and again.

They are perhaps a little like that clay in the potter's house that we heard about in the reading from Jeremiah.

They are lumps, working daily on being formed into the best people they can be.

The potter never threw out the clay when something didn't work out under their hands, they just continued to work with it.

You and I are not perfectly formed vessels and we may in fact, need some serious squishing and squashing and reworking. And it may not feel particularly good either, it may hurt.

This work with God, this "kingdom of God" building with Jesus is not easy or simple, and we had better be clear about that!

We have got to keep our priorities clear so that we have what we need to get to the building and molding and making...

And our priorities have to be Jesus' priorities, or our house will not stand. These are the priorities I see:

1. The priority is to welcome people, even if they are not father or mother, sister or brother.
2. The priority is to be gentle, and just, in our dealings with one another. We will eschew labels and avoid prejudices. We will not gossip and slander.
3. The priority is to practice sharing of resources, and sharing of goods so that none are hungry, none are left out, none are abandoned to despair. Sometime our resources are money but sometimes they are friendship, and a listening ear, or a hunt for professional assistance, or particular skills.
4. Our priority is the safety of all who enter here. No one here will be threatened or abused. And if it happens, we will stop it.
5. Our priority will be to rest when we need rest, work hard when we need to work hard, and play together (and apart) because play heals us!
6. Our priority will be to bring our lives to God in prayer and praise in this place. Prayer and singing lift our spirits and our hearts; it gives us new energy and hope when ours

runs low. And when our emotional resources are indeed low, and we are sore or hurting...we find comfort in the love of God and the strength of Jesus. We find comfort in one another too, seeing in each other, the face of Jesus.

We know this is the work of a lifetime, and you and I will get tired and we will be surprised by life and the curves it throws, the rocks in the path.

But we have the love of God which is lifted up today in Psalm 139: The Lord who has searched us and known us since the very beginning and who will be with us to the very end.

We are not alone. We trust in the love and boundless creative energy of God, and even the hard work of great challenges and great change will not drive us away from that strength, that loving kindness, that constancy that is God's true love for us.

Alleluia and Amen.