

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, September 5, 2010

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas

“I am the Potter, you are the clay.”

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This week's Lectionary readings:

Jeremiah 18:1-11

Psalms 139:1-5, 13-17

Philemon 1-21

Luke 14:25-33

Well, just in case you haven't heard, the past two weeks have been "interesting" for me. I had THREE back surgeries in twelve days. I developed a staph infection after the first surgery and then, they tried to suck out the infection but ended up having to take me back to surgery to "undo" all they had done just so the infection could be controlled. Between the surgeries, the x-rays and the antibiotics, I have had my faith tested. Being "sick" mainly chaps my backside because I have to give control of my life to other people. We tend to take so many things for granted and despise being "handicapped" by our physical "temple". My "temple" has undergone major "renovation" and the finishing touches are being applied too slowly for my tastes. Every day is different, just it always has been. I did not get to make my address to the Rally held last Saturday because I was still waking up from surgery. I sent my son and he did a magnificent job WITHOUT A teleprompter. I thank him for his help. I may lose this election but, all my mistakes are being written down so I can help someone else get elected. Most of us learn best by doing. Suffering physical "infirmities" is a part of life and often the best teacher. Once again, attitude is the most important thing we get from living our lives. Being a slow learner I KNOW that my ATTITUDE is hopeful and more determined than ever. After all, the ONLY thing in life over which we have any control is our ATTITUDE. Thanks to all for your prayers, your wishes for healing and your cards and letters. Help me get well by helping someone who needs it more than I and your work will bless all concerned.

Jeremiah 18:1-11

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Come, 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. 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.

Then the word of the LORD came to me: 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. At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, 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. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, 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. 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.

Some of you may be shocked that I have even heard of Bishop T.D. Jakes let alone his “church” called “The Potter’s House”. Bishop Jakes is a man who preaches in a “parabolic” method intertwined with “text-based” lessons. His style appeals to the people in his pews because they hear the Gospel in a message they can grasp and use to live lives of “success” and JOY. Pottery is as old as civilization and everyone who heard these words of Jeremiah could relate to the “parable” he was teaching. One of the “neat” things about “throwing pots” on a wheel is that, if one makes a mistake, the potter simply crushes what was unpleasing and “starts over” to make something more pleasing. Jeremiah was warning the Israelites about two “aspects” of God’s character: CREATOR and DESTROYER. The power to create or destroy lies within the Creator who gets the “last word” on what is “pleasing”. The “clay” does not have the “will” to create itself. Apart from the actions of the Creator, it remains a “lump of clay” of little use and without beauty. Once completed, the “potter” marks his “work” with a “signature” verifying that HE made the object. What is the “mark” that we receive that indicates that the Creator made you and me? Is there a price tag on each of us? We must be of value because God sent his only Son to pay for each of us.

Psalm 139:1-5, 13-17 Page 794, BCP

Domine, probasti

1

***LORD, you have searched me out and known me; **
***you know my sitting down and my rising up;*
you discern my thoughts from afar.****

2

You trace my journeys and my resting-places *
and are acquainted with all my ways.

3

Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, *
but you, O LORD, know it altogether.

4

***You press upon me behind and before *
and lay your hand upon me.***

5

***Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; *
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.***

13

***I will thank you because I am marvelously made; *
your works are wonderful, and I know it well.***

14

***My body was not hidden from you, *
while I was being made in secret
and woven in the depths of the earth.***

15

***Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb;
all of them were written in your book; *
they were fashioned day by day,
when as yet there was none of them.***

The psalmist might make us think that God works for the Census Bureau, the F.B.I. or the I.R.S. In today's world, there is no "individual" privacy. This must have been shocking information to those who heard the words of this psalm for the first time. With all the technology that we possess today, it is quite possible to "watch the baby's being formed". Why do we think we can hide anything from our Creator? If the Creator knew us before we were in the womb, while in the womb and from our birth, that is truly remarkable? Into what "book" was the information written? If the Creator made us and knows what our lives will be, is there anything that sets apart from the animals? Does "pre-destination" exist? Is each of us "copywrited"? Many of our problems arise when we forget that we are "created by God" and try to be "self-made". If I think of myself as "self-made", I should have not quit work so early in life. The "artistic license" holds that God alone has the power of creating life OR taking life. Trying to "play God" is dangerous in many ways because it pretends that WE have control rather than God. Our ATTITUDE about who created us and ALL of God's creation is most important IF we are to succeed in life.

Philemon 1-21

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love-- and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother-- especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

This is the shortest of the New Testament “books” because it is a personal letter between Paul and a slave-owner, Philemon. Apparently, when Onesimus, the run-away slave, left his owner’s home, he was not a Christian but wanted to return to his master as a “practicing Christian”. The passage even intimates that Paul “stole” Onesimus from his “owner”, Philemon? Run-away slaves were often beaten, blinded or disfigured as a “mark” of their attempted run-away episode. Paul was laying the ground work for Onesimus’ return as an “equal” in the Lord and thus, not a true run-away. To me, this is but one of many instances when “earthly” laws should be superseded by God’s law of love. Paul played the “full deck of cards” in this one letter. Paul played “teacher”, the “old man” card, the “friend” card, the “Christian guilt” card and the “I’ll be happy to pay his debts” card. We do not know the outcome of this story but, I’ll wager that it worked to restore Onesimus and Philemon’s relationship. “Blessed are the peace-makers...” is consistent with what we know of Jesus.

Luke 14:25-33

Now large crowds were traveling with Jesus; and he turned and said to them, "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. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 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? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."

I feel certain that wherever Jesus went, there were “hangers-on” who just wanted to be seen with Jesus. There are a lot of people who attend churches just so they, too, can be seen and not heard. God forbid that someone ask THEM to DO something. Church, to them, is “entertainment” not unlike watching an NFL game. Jesus gave the “crowd” something to ponder as they walked along. ***"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. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 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? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."*** Wow, what a challenge. Did Jesus mean that I should HATE my parents and everyone else to be obedient? When faced with a “commandment” that is contrary to what you already know of God and Jesus, STOP and THINK because the consistency is paramount in the discussion. Luke, the author, was not present when these words were spoken but, rather, depended on the memories of witnesses to the event. In MY OPINION, the story is about the fact that few actually have understood the “cost” of true discipleship. Following Christ may “cost” us relationships with our fathers, our mothers, our siblings and, to THESE PEOPLE, their very lives. He also talked about those who “fell into and out of love” with Christ because they were ashamed to be called followers of Jesus. Being a Christian is both a CHOICE and an ATTITUDE? It seems most consistent with

Christ that having CHOSEN to belong to Christ, MY ATTITUDE would impel me to love my friends and family more. Whether they are able to accept it or reject it is THEIR CHOICE to change THEIR ATTITUDE.