

SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 8, 2013

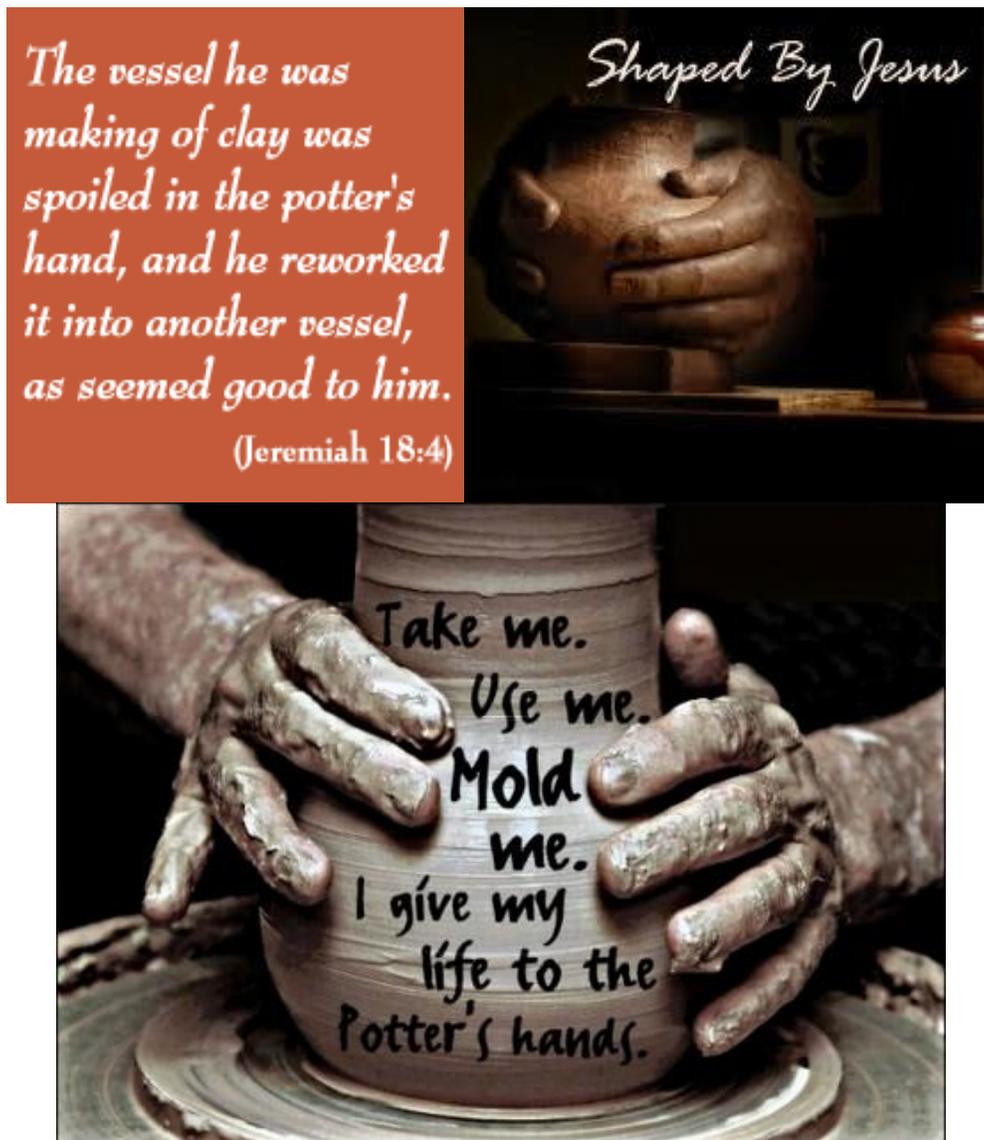
The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i (UCC)
16th Sunday after Pentecost/Grandparents Day 2013

7:45 Worship Service

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

Message: ***"We Are the Body of Christ—Creating Something of Beauty!"***

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Gathering in the Word

There are some hard things in the Bible—we need to look and seek GOD's truth for us in them and to create something of beauty!

Our choices we make every day in our lives have consequences and cost—for us and our families, our neighborhoods, our Church and the World around us. Our lessons remind us this morning that we love GOD best by bringing beauty and joy to the world.

In GOD's realm of Shalom & Peace—we are invited to be artists who join GOD in bringing healing to our neighborhoods, our families, our world. The vision of an impossible ideal—can motivate us to seek the most realistic transformation in our current situation—individually and corporately as the Body of Christ at TFCCCH!

Hearing the Word

Jeremiah 18:1-11 (The VOICE Bible)

18 ¹The word of the Eternal came to Jeremiah.

Now God's message comes through another prophetic drama played out in a potter's shop somewhere in the city. The prophet sees an ordinary event but receives an extraordinary message.

Eternal One: ² Go down to the potter's shop *in the city*, and wait for my word.

³ So I went down to the potter's shop and found him making something on his wheel. ⁴ And *as I watched*, the clay vessel in his hands became flawed *and unusable*. So the potter started again with the same clay. He *crushed and squeezed and* shaped it into another vessel that was to his liking. ⁵ In that moment, I heard *again* God's word *for His rebellious people*.

Eternal One: ⁶ O people of Israel, can I not do the same to you as this potter has done? You are like clay in my hands—I will mold you *as I see fit*. ⁷ If I declare that I am going to uproot, stamp out, or destroy a

nation or kingdom *because of its wicked ways*, and ⁸ then that same nation *I warned* turns away from its evil, then I will change my plans. *In My compassion*, I will not destroy it. ⁹ If at some other time I declare that I am going to build up and establish a nation, ¹⁰ but then it ignores My voice, thus committing evil right in front of Me, I will hold back the good I had planned for them.

(to Jeremiah) ¹¹ Now, *prophet*, say to the people of Judah and the citizens of Jerusalem these words from the Eternal: “Look! I am planning and shaping disaster against you. *Like clay on a wheel, I will shape you and your destiny*. Turn back from your evil ways—all of you—*before it is too late*. Do what is right and good.”

Jeremiah 18:1-11

Jeremiah 18 describes GOD’s activity in the world as artistic and creative. GOD has a vision, works with materials that have their own integrity, and must adjust to the characteristics of the “clay” with which GOD works. Also God’s work in the world is profoundly concrete and enhanced or limited by the inherent and natural characteristics of the clay.

- ✓ When we are attentive and all our ears are listening carefully to GOD, GOD can do great things and invites us to flourish in new and creative ways!
- ✓ If we turn away from GOD, GOD continues to work—but with a more limited set of possibilities among us and the Church!

Luke 14:25-33 (The VOICE Bible)

Jesus continues to challenge Jewish ideas about who will be in the kingdom of God and how the Kingdom will work. Those who have been dishonored on earth will be honored in the Kingdom, and those in positions of economic and religious honor here will be dishonored there. He also challenges individuals to reconsider their personal value systems. They should not honor their own lives and family above Christ, but rather give them up for Him.

²⁵ Great crowds joined Him on His journey, and He turned to them.

Jesus: ²⁶ If any of you come to Me without hating your own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and yes, even your own life, you can't be My disciple. ²⁷ If you don't carry your own cross *as if to your own execution* as you follow me, you can't be part of my movement. ²⁸ Just imagine that you want to build a tower. Wouldn't you first sit down and estimate the cost to be sure you have enough to finish what you start? ²⁹ If you lay the foundation but then can't afford to finish the tower, everyone will mock you: ³⁰ "Look at that guy who started something that he couldn't finish!"

³¹ Or imagine a king gearing up to go to war. Wouldn't he begin by sitting down *with his advisors* to determine whether his 10,000 troops could defeat the opponent's 20,000 troops? ³² If not, he'll send a peace delegation quickly and negotiate a peace treaty. ³³ In the same way, if you want to be my disciple, it will cost you everything. ***Don't underestimate that cost!***

Luke 14

- ✓ Are our relationships healthy and affirmative of our relationship to GOD?
- ✓ Are we "possessed" by our possessions, stressed out in our quest for the comforts promised by our American dream?
- ✓ What crosses are we called to carry—and what sacrifices are we challenged to make—to be faithful to GOD's realm?
- ✓ Our choices have serious consequences for us, our family, our neighbors, our Church and the world.

Then Jesus tell two quasi—almost but not quite—parables that are more like analogies or similarities: Verses 28-30 & Verses 31-32. These two stories/analogies seem to be an *off the cuff* and *impromptu* rebuke and scolding to the crowds. It's almost as though Jesus is scolding the many people who were following him around for not having a clue as to what they were doing in that they were the ones who had in fact ***not*** counted the cost ahead of time.

- ✓ They were the people who had to abandon a building project before it was finished because they ran out of money!
- ✓ They were the people who had gone to war against a superior opponent due to lack of advance work as to how strong was the enemy!

Twice Jesus says to people that they have to give up everything and take up the cross if they're going to follow him (Jesus that is).

Many of us here today we raised in the church; and yes—we made a conscious decision to be a follower of Jesus as our Lord and Savior! We went through confirmation or classes with our pastor or Christian Education Director/S.S. Teacher/ or Youth pastor!

Is it too easy for us these days to fall into line behind Jesus?

Then there's this: **Bible scholars** (like F.F. Bruce) **teach that the word *hate* in OT and NT really means a secondary form of love!**

This hate also means a “lesser form of love.” Note that in the Matthew 10:37ⁱ parallel to Luke 14 version of the same story—Matthew makes it clear that what Jesus is getting at here are those who love father or mother **more** than they love their Savior Jesus.

What Jesus has in mind here is radical and far-reaching. In Jesus' day, to be under the sign of the cross was to be under the sign of death. It was to live in such a way as to make clear that you have put to death all the things of this world—

- ✓ its addiction to power,
- ✓ its cut-throat ways of climbing to the top of any and every heap,
- ✓ Its love of violence and intimidation and war.

To live this way was to engage in a form of *living death* and of *sacrificial living* for the sake of others and the Kingdom & Realm of GOD!

It's this Kingdom awareness that what Jesus is really saying is that we ought to love family and friends less than we love him—Jesus!

Yes—we do love our spouse, our children, our family and even our church family.

But let's never mistake family values for the way the Kingdom of GOD comes.

- ✓ Let's never mistake healthy marriages for what the Kingdom alone will bring to all our relationships.
- ✓ Let's never forget that salvation comes via a cross and that all who want to experience joy of that salvation—walk under the symbol of death as a lifelong reminder of what matters and what does not and of the Only One who ever was so filled with truth and grace that he caused a light to shine in our darkness—a light that will never go out!

Doing the Word

So what is the Word of God for us?

1. ONE: FAMILY IS REDEFINED FOR CHRISTIANS:

- ✓ Our biological family cannot become our ultimate value—**important as that is!**
- ✓ There is a prior relationship to GOD who is GOD!
- ✓ A new family, created in Christ, transcends blood, race, class, and gender—**the Body of Christ—the Church!**
- ✓ And that's why we gather and need to gather regularly!

2. TWO: PLACE GOD IN THE CENTER OF OUR LIVES!

When we do that—that all things fall in place together! But at times—we need to refocus and get it right again and again!

Love GOD more than anything!

Sent in the Word

Today's contemporary Church has to wrestle with the reality of following a radical, counter-cultural prophet. His message and actions will not always be easy to follow or to transfer simplistically into our twenty-first century context.

The first stanza of Reinhold Niebuhr's prayer, which is often misquoted (a little bit), comes to mind here:

**God, give us grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.**

Amen!

ⁱ Matthew 10:44-39: ³⁴ Do not imagine that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ I have come to turn men against their fathers, daughters against their mothers, and daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law. ³⁶ You will find you have enemies even in your own household. ³⁷ If you love your father or mother more than you love me, then you are not worthy of Me. If you love your son or daughter more than you love Me, then you are not worthy of Me. ³⁸ If you refuse to take up your cross and follow Me *on the narrow road*, then you are not worthy of Me. ³⁹ To find your life, you must lose your life—and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.