

## SEPTEMBER 7, 2019 SUMMARY SERMON-JOHN TSCHUDY

### SCRIPTURE LESSON JEREMIAH 18:1-11, PHILEMON 1-21, Luke 14:25-33

Here's three more interesting texts that provide a lot for a sermon that is not very comforting, but is important, somewhat controversial and somewhat easier to preach 40 years ago than it is to preach today. Jeremiah is a fairly straight forward warning from God to the people through Jeremiah. God sends Jeremiah to the potter's house so that he can watch the potter at work. The whole point is God wants Jeremiah to see how the potter is in control of the clay and controls the final outcome of the process of making the pot. If it doesn't turn out the way the potter wants it to, the clay can simply be reshaped into something else. The point God is making is that the people of Jerusalem and Judah are simply the clay God is using to make a pot that God wants. If they don't turn into the people God wants them to be then God can just crush the clay and start over to make another pot. As the old saying goes God is the potter, we are the clay that God can shape into anything God wants.

People use to believe that but now we don't take that kind of warning very seriously. We just don't believe God would do that today. (If we believe there is a God!) Besides across the spectrum of church teaching the major focus is on forgiveness and less and less emphasis is on what life could be if we followed God's commands. What kind of God do we believe in? Do we believe in the "Potter God" that will reshape the clay into the style of pot wanted, or do we think God will accept whatever the final outcome is?

The letter to Philemon is just that a personal letter from Paul to an important follower of his, Philemon. Yet this personal letter has stirred great controversy in our nation's history and the personal theology of many people. In the lead up to the Civil War this letter was used as evidence on both sides of the debate over slavery. Because Paul sends Onesimus, seemingly a runaway slave back to Philemon some argued then and now that Paul doesn't see slavery as a moral wrong. At the same time others argued that Paul sent Onesimus back with the instructions to Philemon with the wish he be set free and sent back to help Paul because he wanted Philemon to set him free since Paul in other places says that in Christ there is no slave and free but all are one in Christ. Paul seems to want Onesimus set free and allowed to return to him where he can be a helper to Paul in both his ministry and helping him while he is in prison. Other texts seem to indicate that Paul also had some growing health issues so a servant could be a big help. It is interesting to see this personal letter included by the early church as a part of the scriptures. Clearly it is written by Paul personally but why is it widely read? What is the teaching that is so important in it that Christians other than Philemon were reading it? While there is still controversy over it, the general belief of many traditions is that Paul is calling for an end to slavery among Christians.

I'm really not sure I want to do anything with the Gospel lesson this week because if we take it seriously, it calls into question many of the popular values of today and raises a whole lot of controversial issues that people want to deny or not deal with today. In approaching it we have to ask the questions of how seriously are we to take it and did Jesus mean for it to be taken literally? Over the forty years I've been in ministry the approach to texts like this one has drastically changed to primarily soften its meaning and intent, if not totally move in the direction of ignoring it. And that takes us back to the potter's house and are we being the vessels God created us to be? The nicest way I can interpret this text is to say that if we are to be following Jesus that must be the most important thing in our life, even more important than life itself.

How many of us consider what it takes to be a Christian? The norm for many of us was parents bring us to church as we grew up. They had us Baptized and we were confirmed either because they said we would be or they bribed us with something we wanted to go through confirmation. Maybe later some of us considered what being a Christian meant but today I wonder how many of us really do think about what being a Christian means and what being a disciple of Jesus should cost us. But how many of us are willing to give up all of our possessions to be a Christian, a follower of Christ? Today many expect the church to do what they want it to do to get even a small part of their precious possessions. Do we really think this is the pot that God shaped us to be? Where does the church and following Christ come in the priorities of our lives?