

September 8, 2019 Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Carolyn Albert Donovan
Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas

GOSPEL

Luke 14:25-33

The holy gospel according to Saint Luke, the fourteenth chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

²⁵Now large crowds were traveling with [Jesus;] 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. ²⁷Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For 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? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹Or 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? ³²If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

How interesting that on *this* day in the church’s year...when our denomination has declared it to be “God’s Work, Our Hands” Sunday, a day of service across the country...How interesting that today of all days...the prophet Jeremiah draws our attention instead to God’s hands...saying how God is like a potter molding clay.

I love art...especially sculptural art forms...though I have not cultivated enough patience in myself to learn them. One of my two favorite job titles in

the world is a position at Holden Village in Washington State. It is the job of Village Potter. I just feel better living in a world where there are village potters. (Incidentally, my other favorite job title is also from Holden. In addition to having a Village Potter, they also have a full-time Garbologist. It's an awesome place.)

I have never learned to create the kind of art that potters and sculptors make, but I love watching them do it. I've been watching a new show on Netflix lately...called Blown Away. Maybe you've seen it...

It's a competition reality show of glassblowers. It's fascinating. (Also incidentally, if you want a chance to see glass blowing up close, we're talking a congregational trip to Salado Glassworks on Tuesday, December 10 – where you can actually work with one of the glassblowers to create your own Christmas ornament. Details are on facebook and in the Messenger. Shameless plug over.)

Watching artists work...in glass or in clay...they begin with a vision before they put their hands to their materials...and then they begin to shape their visions into physical reality. The things they see in their minds begin to become real. But then...sometimes...glass breaks...clay shifts...It seems to have a mind of its own. There is frustration...even anger...in that moment when the plan is no longer possible. (This is where my patience...or rather lack thereof...usually kicks in and I storm away in frustration.) But...with the greatest artists...at the moment of shift, of disaster, of destruction...there is a deep breath...and the vision changes...reacts...adapts...and evolves. It follows the materials in a delicate dance...both shaping them...imposing the artist's will on them...and also listening to them.

If God is the potter and we are the clay...are we just mindless lumps...waiting to become who God will make us to be? From what I've seen of potters working clay...I don't think so. Sometimes the clay or the glass seems to have a mind of their own...and God certainly gave us minds of our own. God didn't want to create with inert, lifeless lumps. God is a collaborator. God gave the clay minds

of our own. Yet God is still the artist that shapes us...not just once but throughout our whole lives.

Sometimes we shift...sometimes we even break...Sometimes we do it on purpose. Sometimes it happens to us. The fire is too hot. Something hits us the wrong way. And in those moments or shift...or disaster...I think God changes the plans God has for we did not choose, God doesn't give up on the act of creating. God breathes in and out the breath of life...and changes the plan. The vision evolves.

God is a great improviser. We are not today the thing we were being made into last year or even last week...because God does what great artists do and keeps working with us...letting what we will emerge...

Watching great artists...it is as if they collaborate with their medium...stone, clay, paint, glass...Our lives are a collaboration between us and our Creator.

I think this beautiful truth also relates to Jesus' hard words today in Luke's gospel...words about counting the cost of following Jesus. Jesus isn't at a private dinner party any more. He is out now speaking to the crowds that have gathered around because they have heard about the wonders he does...And he takes this moment to warn them that this is not a traveling circus...a magic show...or a life-improvement seminar. To be a part of what Jesus is doing comes at great cost. It can cost family, and possessions...and life itself...

Jesus turns to the gathered throng and issues a warning. He bucks the blueprint for great recruiting techniques. He cares more that they know what they are getting into than about the size of the crowd he can draw.

The choice is there to follow...but the work ahead is so huge. And Jesus' words might make us doubt our qualifications...our abilities...maybe even our interest. Can we finish the tower...win the battle...carry the cross? Can we be what a follower of Jesus really is?

I don't know. I sometimes doubt it. Can we pay the price that Jesus describes?

Or...maybe an even more cutting question...if our lives today haven't been turned upside down and inside out...are we really following Jesus?

Again...I sometimes doubt it.

I doubt that I have yet become what God envisioned for me. I have been the shifting clay...the cracked glass...sometimes because of my own disinterest in living my life as God first dreamed...and sometimes because of what others have done to me...or what happened in my life.

But I believe that God is still there...hands caked with clay...with the pieces of our lives slowly being shaped or pared away. The potter is still creating. And we are still being created...being shaped by those hands to reach out our own...in love and in care.

Maybe this year God's Work, Our Hands Sunday...should be God's Hands, Our Hands Sunday. Dear precious creation of the greatest artist that has ever been and ever will be...you are being created still...and your hands...your hopes...your experiences...all those things are being shaped to be a part of the work of God. You are a masterpiece...but not only that...you were created so you might also create. What love, beauty or justice will your hands bear into the world this week? Blessings upon your work of creating and continuing to be created.

Thanks be to God. Amen.