

## Do Overs

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

### Slide: Jeffrey

Here is my nephew all graduated from high school as of this spring! His name is Jeffrey. Jim and I are the proud Uncle and Aunt to this young man, who decided, without any pressure from us, to go to our very own Alma Mater, Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. He moved into his dorm this weekend, not the dorm I would have chosen, as in the one I lived in, but hey, you can't have everything.

Jeffrey begins something brand new going to college with a music scholarship to play his cello and he will be majoring in chemistry and physics. Jim is thrilled of course, being that Jim also majored in Chemistry at PLU. It's so exciting to see this and brings up so many memories of my own, remembering my own first day at moving in on campus.

It seems like yesterday that Jeffrey was so little. And, he loved to play board games. As with our nieces, playing these games meant when you were that little, that the adult would do everything possible to help the child win the game so they can feel good about themselves, and maybe also to avoid any tears or tantrum, too. Perhaps you did the same?

I call it "The Do Over". The Do Over was simply what it sounds like. Oh, didn't get the ball through the hoop? Do over Jeffrey! Didn't roll the dice you wanted. Do over. Couldn't throw the horseshoe near the spike for the game of Horseshoes? Do over. Do over we would yell. There was no real end to the game, just the fun of the game and you could try and try until you achieved the result you wanted.

Of course, life doesn't work that way with many or most things. Jeffrey already knows that quizzes, papers and grades generally don't come with Do Overs. You have to do the work. You

have to do it well, take the critique, change the edits, and finish the product for the best result you hope for.

### **Slide: Potter**

The prophet Jeremiah is asked to make a visit to a potter's house. Along with a similar prophesy from Isaiah chapter 64 where God proclaims to be the potter while we are the clay, the prophet Jeremiah is instructed to explain to the people that God, like a potter, can take, mold, destroy and recreate a pot again if God so chooses.

And, it seems like God is giving an ultimatum through the beautiful image of art – through wedging, centering, opening and shaping clay, which every potter in every town in the ancient world would have intimately known. A step gone a bit wrong, the pot is misshapen, broken, cracked. Some never get fired in the oven. Some get redone while on the wheel as the shape collapses.

It is a call to turn away from evil, to turn back to God

and enter into deepening relationship with the Creator. Depending upon how you read it, you can hear it as threatening. As potter, God could destroy this pot entirely or choose to make something new from it, to mold it and begin again. As prophet, however, Jeremiah's point is likely broad towards an entire people rather than individuals. We tend to think of ourselves as individuals when we read scripture, often a side effect of being American, applying our own culture to scripture instead of understanding theirs.

Therefore, it's important I think to understand the covenantal nature God has with the Israelites, a group, not one person or two or three, but all, an entire nation of going away from God then back again. Over and over they do this to their detriment in scripture and over and over again God warns. Their own demise is ultimately up to them and because of them, and their inability to change their ways, rather going their own way instead, the fall of Judah and Israel is on their

heads, they are taken into captivity until such a time that clay can be remolded and remade again.

There in this reading here in the Prophet Jeremiah, the use of extremes is meant to be dynamic to get the point across: a perfect pot or one that was ruined, destroyed and remade. The potter makes the decision about the acceptability of the pot's form, and the potter decides when the pot is no longer acceptable and must be made anew. But, will God relent as God did before? Do they get a Do Over?

In the whole length of scripture, we have a resounding yes! Over and over we witness their greed, malice, idolatry and apathy and over and over again they endure the result of that way of life through suffering. They do fall, the people of God in scripture. But, in their captivity, God promises to remake them and put the covenant promise on their hearts. God sends Jesus to remake what was torn down.

Anyone who longs to live a faithful life acknowledges that God has expectations of us. We have a loving God, but not so we can just do whatever we want whenever we want it. We have responsibilities as Christ followers to walk in paths of service, of love for neighbor and recognize our own sinfulness. To think that we build, mold and create our own pot, to take the place of the potter is haughty at the least and heretical at the worst.

As God's people, we confess that we are in need of God, of the potter to mold us, each time we come to worship: to gather, hear the word, eat the supper and go out into the world. Yes, of course there are expectations for us to turn away from evil, falsehood, injustice and greed because we are God's people.

This is why Jesus speaks of discipleship as something that isn't passive in today's Gospel. It isn't one foot in, but both feet in. As he says in the little parable, taking up your cross is all the way. You

don't start a house with only half the money hoping you can finish it, only to leave a foundation with nothing on it. The clay pot God molds us into does take cost. It cost Christ everything. Christ was broken into shards to make this vessel, us, new again. So, of course God longs for us to be serious about that cost as we respond to the gift. God longs to create something new from the dust of the cross.

### **Slide: Opening the Pot**

That new thing is the Potter taking the pot that wasn't working and creating a new one. It's a Do Over. It's a Do Over every time we wake up and remember the waters of baptism which promise that we die to sin and rise to Christ. It's a Do Over when we say to God, I messed up. It's a Do Over when we tell a friend I'm sorry. Do Overs are the business of God. It is the business of Christ because Christ died for it.

We are in the middle of a Do Over. Here at St. John's, a lot of challenge has happened in the last couple

years. Sure, all churches have endured the same, but I'm not talking about all churches. I mean us. God may be remaking the clay as we speak. The people of God are going along as best they can and really, we can only discern together what that ought to be.

So, we are going to try a new schedule as things begin again with many of our programs in the hopes of bringing back fellowship together. Fellowship is a simple concept really. It's simply gathering in Christ's name. I know this schedule is likely talked about even though I don't hear all of it. Some are going to really like it. Others will not.

But, in their faithfulness, the church council decided to try something new and they all know it could really work or not. Please pray for your council. They are all faithful people doing what they can to figure things out, things that have been really challenging in these times today. And, we together are still muddling through without a youth and

family person on our staff. Our ministries are full of wonderful people who are pretty tired, but they love this church. They continue on in hope for the future but they cannot do this on their own forever without a lot more help and expertise. Please pray for those ministries as they tackle another year like this. The cracks and crevices of change are difficult but in all things, God still gives us Do Overs. Who knows what amazing things God has in store for us?

We get a Do Over and we get to attempt to do it together, but not with one foot in, not with half the house built, not by turning away to just do our own way, but all in together as discipleship calls us to. I'm thankful for you as we do this together. I'm thankful for you heart of love for this church and people as I see over and over again.

Eric Holey gave me today a few examples of pots that don't make the list for sale. A pot that doesn't get sold usually has something that doesn't make the cut. It

either has cracks, or is not even or it's lopsided. In the whole process, something happens to the pot that it doesn't thrive. These are those pots here.

### **Slide: Heart of Clay**

But, as Roxanne told me, they are still lovely. And, they have worth. Someone could love them. It makes me think about me. It makes me think about us. It makes me think about you. As a vessel, we need the help of the potter to call us lovely enough to mold us, remake us, and call us valued. And, through Christ, God does. God gives us a good grooming and a brand new start all the time. Isn't that wonderful?

And, isn't that wonderful enough to go all in to follow Jesus? I think so. I hope you do, too. Amen.