

## Jeremiah 18:1-11

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: <sup>2</sup>'Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words.' <sup>3</sup>So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. <sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to me: <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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.

## Luke 14:25-33

<sup>25</sup> Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup>'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. <sup>27</sup>Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. <sup>28</sup>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? <sup>29</sup>Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup>saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish." <sup>31</sup>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? <sup>32</sup>If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. <sup>33</sup>So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

## What Is Your Ultimate Concern?

Some of you might respond, "It depends on when you ask me, Pastor." Most of us are concerned about lots of things in the course of a day; "Will my alarm clock go off?" "Did the dog leave any little 'presents' for me this morning?" "Will I make it to work on time?" "Is my wife still angry with me for the comment I made at dinner last night? Maybe I should buy her some flowers today." "Do I need to make a doctor's appointment for Sarah? She's had that sore throat for three days. Has she started smoking?" "Should I upgrade my service plan with Verizon to get those additional movie channels?" Most of us spend our entire day concerned about a lot of different things, and some of us lay awake at night still concerned about so many things.

But regarding all of these concerns Jesus says, "Time out." Listen to what he says in our Gospel lesson:

"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."

"None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."

Here you are concerned about your family, and Jesus says you have to 'hate' them, or love him more than them, if you want to be his disciple. And carry a cross? That's like saying you need to endure water boarding if you want to follow him. Forget the movie channels; you need to give up your whole home entertainment system and everything else if you want to follow him.

Some Christians think they have it easy in comparison to a Hassidic Jew whose entire life is dictated by written law; they say "Jesus came to free us from the law so we can eat lobster and baby back ribs and drive to the beach on Saturdays. Jesus is not that strict." You're wrong! If you were given the choice of following all the details of Hassidic Jewish Law, like wearing certain clothes and styling your hair in certain ways and not turning things on and off on certain days or selling all your possessions and carrying around a wooden cross, *which would you choose?*

And I believe the honest response is neither. I don't want a religion that gives me a bunch of laws to follow, and I don't want consider Jesus to be more important than my family or possession or comfort and safety. I mean, I like Jesus, but I just don't want to throw my life away for him. And who does he think he is anyway to make such outrageous demands of me?

But then you end up here in church. What's up with that? If Jesus' words are so offensive, why are you coming here? Glutton for punishment? "Go ahead, Pastor; read that verse to me again so I can feel *really* bad." What draws you to a place where you are constantly reminded of the excessive demands that God makes of you?

The answer I believe is simple; Jesus is drawing you to him and you are allowing yourself to be drawn to him. It's called faith. It's not faith in some theology that tells you all the circumstances surrounding his birth, death, and resurrection so much as it is faith in his divinity, and because he is divine he is your ultimate concern. Isn't God everyone's ultimate concern?

No, but he should be because every other concern is ultimately not ultimate. Faith is about being drawn to whatever ultimately concerns you. For some people that ultimate concern is their country, and they will readily die for their country, even when that country is perpetrating evil – look at the Nazis of Germany. For many their ultimate concern is their spouse or their children or other members of their family, and they would die for any of them. For some, their ultimate concern is personal power or wealth. But God must take precedence over any other

concern, because only God is ultimate, or infinite. All else will turn to dust – nations, families, cars, animals. Only God endures through it all, and because you have been created in his image you have strong attraction to the infinite. And faith is your willful step toward the infinite.

So Jesus is not putting off would-be disciples here; he's telling them to take the plunge, to stop sitting by the edge of the pool with only your feet in the water and JUMP IN. Jeremiah, speaking on behalf of God, says pretty much the same thing in our Old Testament reading, but he's speaking to a whole nation that has gone astray, that has stopped listening to God, stopped being concerned about him and being concerned about other things instead. And God says, "I will destroy you if you don't change your ways" – we tend to think of God only in terms of the nice things he does, but he has power over life and death, and when he allows bad things to happen it doesn't mean that he's not real. The life you live and the natural attraction that you feel toward the divine is enough evidence for God's existence. Jesus and Jeremiah are both telling us that we need to surrender in faith to that force that draws us to God.

I know summer vacation is coming to a close, and the time when you could be *less* concerned about things like work is ending. The question is, "Are you giving enough attention to the One who should be your ultimate concern?" A more revealing question may be this: "Did you take the opportunity to spend more time with God during your summer vacation?" Summer can be a season of renewal of faith, but to many it's a time that they devote less time to God. Life is stressful enough; you don't need to add stress to your life by failing to give adequate time and attention to God, the One who should be *everyone's* ultimate concern. **Make God your priority**, certainly more of a priority than beaches and ballgames, and even more of a priority than your own family, even your own life. To neglect or resist God is not just foolish; it's tragic, because whatever else you give priority to, whatever else becomes your ultimate concern, it is bound to disappoint you. It can't love you like God. It can't sustain you like God. It can't fix you like God. It can't satisfy you like God.