

September 4 2016

Scripture Lesson

Psalm 139

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Jeremiah 18:1-11

Sermon *The Potter's Wheel*

When I was reading through the list of scripture readings for today, the one from Jeremiah struck a chord with me. God tells Jeremiah to go to a potter's house and he will hear the words from God. Jeremiah goes to the potter's house and the potter is working with clay on his wheel. The vessel that he was working on didn't turn out the way the potter wanted it to so he reworked the clay into another vessel and this was one to his liking. The scripture goes on as Susan read and we learn that God is talking to Jeremiah about Israel and how the people need to listen to him and obey his commands. However I think we can take this scripture and apply it to ourselves personally.

When George and I were living in Oregon in the late 70's, we took a pottery class at the local community college. We learned how to work the clay and make things out of slabs. George made a box that looks like a caboose. I made a box not nearly as good as the caboose but still thought I was doing pretty well. Then came the day that we were to learn how to make something with clay on the wheel. I don't remember how George did but the wheel won in my case. Hopefully I didn't sling clay all over my fellow classmates. Creating a vessel out of clay on a potter's wheel isn't a simple task. We also learned that the clay needed to be moist and malleable to be able to create anything out of it. If it became dry and hard, you couldn't form it into the shape that you wanted to make.

So think of you as the clay and the potter is God. Hopefully you can picture yourself as clay and God is forming you to make you into the vessel of his liking. There is a difference between us and clay, however. Clay doesn't have a choice of what it is made into because it is inanimate. It can be molded into any shape that the potter wants. We are different in that God created us with free will. We can choose to follow our own way, just like the Israelites were doing. However, God wants us to be malleable so He can shape us into the person He wants us to be. God doesn't force us, but asks us to open our hearts to Him.

Because we are human and have free will, there are times when we resist how God is working us on the wheel. We start to become dry making it more difficult to be molded. We think that we can do it ourselves; we don't need anyone to mold us. Fortunately for us, God doesn't give up and keeps trying to work with us. He can add some water to our clay and rework it, making us easier to work with. Even

if we really resist the working of God on ourselves and become rock hard, there is still hope. Pottery that has been fired can only be changed if it is broken. Even if we have become so resistant to God that we resemble a fired piece of clay, we can be broken and God is there to pick up the pieces and mix our clay with water so that we become malleable in his hands once again. Psalm 51:17 says, ‘A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.’ Maybe it takes becoming a little dry or even as hard as fired clay for us to be able to say. “God, I can’t do it on my own anymore. I’ve tried and it is not working! I need you!”

We need to remember that as long as we are in the Master’s hands we are a work in progress. As long as we stay malleable, He can continue to work us into the vessel that He wants us to be. There may be times when we become a little too dry and it is more difficult to be molded. There may even be times when we become as hard as fired clay. What we need to remember is that there is always hope. God doesn’t give up on us. He may be shaking his head about us at different times but He will continue to work the clay that we all are until the day comes that we are called home to be with Him.

When I was doing my research, I came across this poem and I would like to close with it. It was written by Irenaeus who was a Christian in the 2nd century.

From God’s Hands

It is not you who shape God; it is God that shapes you.

If then you are the work of God, await the hand of the Artist who does all things in due season.

Offer the Potter your heart, soft and tractable, and keep the form in which the Artist has fashioned you.

Let your clay be moist, lest you grow hard and lose the imprint of the Potter’s fingers.

Before I close George saw in the paper this morning that Mother Teresa was being canonized into sainthood. In honor of Mother Teresa, who labored tirelessly for those in need I would like to read her poem “Do It Anyway”

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.
In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.