

## Sermon September 7, 2025

Jesus speaks of weighing the cost in Luke 14:25-33 in order to fully understand what a life of following Jesus entails, that one must be willing to give up everything and go all in. Following Jesus is not a movement or a fad, but a way of life, that leads through the cross and will cost everything. In Jesus' day, for the disciples, the cost included family relationships and even life.

Now large crowds were traveling with him, and he turned and said to them, "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. 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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 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? If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

## Potter's Clay

In the beginning, God created the world – the mountains and the valleys; the creeks and the seas; and every living creature. God created each of us and all that we see – and God called it all Good.

God's creation is good... but it is not a perfect work of art, set aside in a protected container, to remain the same for all time. God's creation is ever-changing. Seasons change; the tides flow back and forth. Earthquakes build mountains; rivers and glaciers carve canyons and valleys. Even people have

changed and evolved through time. God's good creation never stays the same.

When Jeremiah saw the potter shaping and re-shaping a lump of clay into a new vessel, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "O Israel, can I not do this with you, just like the potter has done? Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand ... you and all creation"

God's creation was not completed in 6 days... God's creative Spirit continues to mold us and shape us. God is not silent... God's creative Spirit continues in our lives and in our world.

The pottery wheel spins, the hands of the potter surround the clay. Sometimes something goes wrong and the clay does not cooperate... the pot is spoiled. But the potter re-works it, gently guiding it upon the wheel, creating something new. Bringing hope to a broken world.

Elie Wiesel was a Romanian Jew who was deported to Auschwitz when he was 15, during another time in our world when God seemed to be silenced in a crumbling world.

Elie's parents and younger sister all died in the camps, but somehow he survived. He went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize and was one of the founders of the Holocaust museum in DC. He wrote this in his book *Night*:

*Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.*

Throughout the many long nights in concentration camps, as millions of people died... as many people as live in the state of Maryland today... it seemed as if God's voice was silent forever.

The problem is not that God no longer speaks to *us*, the problem is that we don't listen to what God says. Today Jesus reminds us of the cost of discipleship. We need to be willing to risk all that we have to follow God: our family relationships, our possessions, our comfort... to pick up the cross and follow him into the darkest valleys. The events in Germany almost 100 years ago remind us how quickly that can change. A 100 years ago, no one sitting in their pews in Germany ever thought that their children or grandchildren would need to decide to risk all that they have to stand against Hitler and stand up for Jesus. Twenty-four years ago, none of us thought we were entering into a new era of terror and war. Ten years ago, we never imagined our own country could be so divided. And, yet despite it all we come back here. Why

Because we know something important! We know that God continues to speak through the brave men and women stand up against oppression in all the ways it looms over God's people. We come here to insist on a new Way of Life.

And, we – people of faith – know that the horrible things we do to one another is not the whole story. We may live in a Good Friday world but we are not a Good Friday people. We can see beyond the horror of crucifixion, of terror, of grief and see the moment when the light bursts forth and offers new rays of hope.

Death and fear and violence is never the end of the story. God can take the most awful events and bring about rebirth... re-forming our pain and despair into something new and wonderful.

We are an Easter People!

God still speaks to us through all the stories of our lives. We don't know what God will call us to do but we know that God still speaks to us. Look around – each of us carries stories of those day-to-day moments when we catch a glimpse of God's presence in our lives. We just need to open our eyes to see God's creative love: a white moth flying by after a serious car accident; the sun streaming through the skies, reminding us of God's hands stretching out to welcome us. God speaks to us through the unexpected phone call received when it is needed most.

God speaks to us all of the time.

Can't you just see it? The pottery wheel spins, the hands of the potter surround the clay. Sometimes something goes wrong and the clay does not cooperate... the pot is spoiled. But the potter re-works it, gently guiding it upon the wheel, creating something new.

Elie Wiesel wrote *"I have not lost faith in God. I have moments of anger and protest. Sometimes I've been closer to (God) for that reason"*

Here, in those moments of closeness, we feel God's presence in our lives. This is where we find the Good News – God's hands are upon us.

We may not always feel God's presence, hear God's voice, see God at work in our lives, but we can rest assured that God's hand stays upon us, transforming the situations of our lives, shaping us for service, envisioning good plans for us. In the protective strength of God's hands we are offered renewed hope. God reworks us and proclaims us Good.

But remember this. No matter how many times the potter reworks the clay, it is still clay. So it is for God's people. No matter what we do or how far we stray, we are still God's people. God is always ready to forgive us and, Oh! How God longs to remold and transform us.

God seeks us out, recovers us when we are lost, transforms our lives. God is truly with us and longs for us to listen. And, when we listen and respond in faith, we find that we are not just simple clay.

Here is the miracle of creation: We become potters too. God came to us in Jesus, showing us how to restore relationships. God comes to us today through the Spirit, resurrecting our lives and transforming our hearts. God shows us over and over again how to re-shape our world and our community, creating something beautiful from a small lump of clay. And when we are done, I pray that we can look at what we have and say with authority: It is good.

### **INVITATIONS TO COMMUNION**

Take this bread, share this wine.

In these, Christ comes to us  
with love from God.

The gifts of God  
for the people of God

We are here because Jesus has called us –  
strangers and friends,  
neighbors and visitors,  
believers and doubters,  
the certain and the curious.

It is always a mixed company that Jesus gathers  
and invites to his table where, in bread and wine,

he meets us  
and through him we, who are different,  
are joined to each other.

So come,  
not because you understand,  
but because you are understood.

Come,  
not because of how you feel,  
but because God has food for you.  
Come, not because you deserve a place,

but because Jesus invites you,  
just as you are.

This table does not belong to any denomination,  
church or community.

It belongs to Jesus.

It was at table that he met people,  
heard their stories and shared his.

It was at table that he deepened his friendship  
with poor folk and prostitutes,  
the business class and puzzled bystanders.

It was at table that he shared profound insights  
into who God is and what God wants.

And it was at table, with bread and wine,  
that he initiated the sacrament we now celebrate.

So come to this table.

Leave behind any baggage of arrogance or unworthiness.

Do not think, 'This is not for me.'

Think rather of Jesus saying, 'I am for you,'  
and accept his invitation to be the friend  
he cherishes and longs to feed.

As Jesus broke bread,  
we break this bread.

As Jesus share wine  
we share this cup.

Come God's people,  
come to receive Christ's heavenly food.

### **Prayer after Communion**

Words cannot express  
the wonder of the Spirit's gathering power,  
the miracle of Christ's life nourishing us across time and space.

May we who have been fed  
enact our gratitude out in the world  
by joining the Spirit in Her holy work  
of breaking down the boundaries that divide  
and building up communities that restore.