

Sunday 4th September 2022

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.
God is ever present, around us and within us,
we worship together in God.

Readings Jeremiah 18: 1-11
 Philemon 1-21 ([Living Bible](#))
 Luke 14:25 - 33

Reflection

Do you watch the Great Pottery Throwdown? There are many ways to create pottery, sculpting, rolling, throwing, pulling etc. but in all of these there is the possibility of having to start again. Recognising that there is a flaw, gathering up the clay and starting again from scratch is part of the learning process. It is part of the journey, sometimes we have to go through the process to achieve the end result.

This passage from Jeremiah is not an easy passage as it depicts a God many of us are unfamiliar with, a God of judgement and punishment but within it is the core truth that within God is forgiveness and the opportunity to make things right. I believe that within God there is free will and the opportunity for a fresh start but the choice is ours. When we take that opportunity it does not eliminate the journey or the history, but it does allow us to rebuild, to travel in a new direction and to 'recreate' ourselves in the knowledge that we are forgiven. We still need to learn from our mistakes for the potter will continue to throw flawed pots if he does not correct the mistake the next time he tries.

In the passage from Philemon we hear of someone who was a flawed pot, Onesimus, but under Paul's guidance he recreated himself and is now a fully functioning clay pot. This letter is about choice and free will. Paul recognises that he has the authority to command Philemon to do as he asks but would rather appeal to him to make the right choice, even if he does hold all he has done for Philemon above him! He wants Philemon to take Onesimus back not as a slave but as a brother and to treat him as he would treat Paul himself.

There is challenge in here for us. Do we encourage others to recognise a better way? Do we love and accept others, faults and all, in the hope that love will open their eyes? Love, we believe can change everything, but how well do we act on that belief? That is part of the cost of discipleship, something our passage from Luke reminds us is not to be taken lightly.

The mention of the cross in this passage may be a bit of a red herring, included with the hindsight of the crucifixion, but the lesson is well made by Luke. A builder does not start building unless they have worked out they can afford the materials to finish it, and a King does not engage in a battle unless he believes he can win it. The followers of Jesus need to be aware that discipleship costs. When we choose love, we are accepting that we must let go of the material way of life and choose people rather than possessions. The command to love one another, to love our neighbour as ourselves is a far reaching commandment. When Jesus sent out the disciples he sent them without possessions, when the rich young man asked what he should do to enter the Kingdom, Jesus told him to give away all he had. Possession getting in the way was the message.

Sharing in the Jesus way is not about sharing what we have left over, it is about sharing everything we have even if that means we end up with less than we think we need. We are all facing a cost of living crisis with inflation higher than for decades, and energy costs that are unprecedented. Everyone is having to make choices but for millions it feels as if there is no choice. Some remember WW2 and the blitz, a time when there was real community spirit and people looked out for one another, there wasn't enough to go round and rationing was introduced but creativity overcame the shortages and most shared whatever good fortune they had.

We are definitely in this together but fear can drive people apart. As followers of Jesus we are called to be the love that holds people together, to encourage a better way of living as one.

How can we love our neighbour in the face of the current situation. Everything has changed and we are going to have to be creative. Energy is the key factor in all of this, without energy people will be cold, they will need blankets, they will need hot water but many of them will not be able to afford to heat the water. Foodbanks are facing new challenges, fewer people are donating but more people are finding themselves having to abandon cooking, so food has to be produced using nothing more than a kettle, if they can afford that. As the weather grows colder it will only get worse and already people are switching off equipment that is vital for health and safety.

Small businesses are facing difficult times their costs have more than trebled in the last six months, their own energy costs but their suppliers are having to raise prices to cover their own increase in energy costs, but most of this they cannot pass on because they know their customers cannot afford it. One way or another their business is a risk. One pub estimates that the true cost of providing a pint of beer is currently running at £14.87. their strikes driven by fear and yet this is not about inequality as we are all facing the same challenges. Some are better equipped to cope at least in the short term but the choices of how to cope are becoming more difficult.

So, What can we as church do, what would Jesus do? He would give people a choice, he would encourage people to share and he would offer practical love that empowers. It is time for some creative thinking. If we have the means to make a difference we should do it together. We need to know our neighbours, be aware of what is happening and work together to provide a place of safety and love. Somewhere to keep warm for a few hours, to have a warm drink, maybe an after school resource that provides a simple hot meal, or a breakfast club to ensure children start the day nourished. We can take a flask of hot water or a blanket to a neighbour, or perhaps cook an extra meal and take it to someone. Many people are switching off fridges and freezers so they have no means of safely storing essential food.

This is a deep and frightening crisis so we also need to be the voice of justice, challenging the government to face up to the challenge and offer a realistic solution. Politicians are not immune from the challenges but their experience may be different, we need to encourage them to put themselves in the place of the vulnerable, in the position of families faced with the harshest of choices – food, heat or a roof over your head, and use their decision making to make a real difference to the lives of millions. Isn't that what being a disciple means, isn't that what Jesus would do?