

## Sermon: 2019/09/08 (13th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C) - Jeremiah 18:1-11 & Luke 14:25-33\_BTR

[Invite children to the front.]

The armies of Babylon were coming.  
They were coming to what was left of Israel - now called, "Judah" - to attack the kingdom and steal their valuables.  
And the people were very afraid.  
*"How could this happen?!"* They asked Jeremiah the prophet.  
*"This isn't fair!"* They complained.

And maybe we can feel like that too?  
That God shouldn't have let something happen that we didn't like.  
*And certainly God is committed to our health and well-being.*  
Remember, He is our "Heavenly Father."  
And He worries about us *all* the time.

But that's not everything that's true about Him.  
Jeremiah points out something extra that we might forget as we think about what happens in the world.  
It was a lesson that was made clear the day Jeremiah visited a 'potter' making a clay-jar in his workshop.  
Jeremiah watched this person carefully and gently and lovingly shape the jar with his hands on a "wheel," which span around.  
But despite his best efforts - the potter's - suddenly the clay became misshapen and ugly and collapsed.  
And what did he do?  
The potter threw it on the floor, and reached for another lump of clay to start again.

And Jeremiah perceived that this was a good illustration about the world and everything in it: it *all* belongs to God.  
*We* are the clay, and *He* is the potter.  
*We belong* to Him.  
*We're His property.*  
And He is free to whatever He wants with what is His.

Let's pray: Father God, we pray that, by your Holy Spirit, you would help us to trust you, your goodness, and in your plans for the world and its people, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

[Dismiss children.]

When I was growing up in England there was a *very* popular shoe-shop called, 'Clarks'.

Clarks only sold *real* leather shoes.

They were old fashioned that way.

(Founded in the early 1800s.)

They didn't sell flip-flops or sneakers or "Crocs."

No, they sold only the sort of thing that the self-respecting Middle Class wore to school or to church: hand-stitched; tough; *shiny*.

And there was, "once upon a time," a Clarks on every high-street; in every town.

And *whenever* you went it was crowded.

And this was especially true as the new school year loomed.

Now, in the UK, that's August.

And so, children being children - growing like weeds, every summer time, about a week or so before classes began, Clarks would be heaving with families looking to buy black or brown brogues or whatever it was that private schools required on their dress-list, and the store would be sooo(!) busy that you almost felt like apologising to the staff when you entered.

Like your custom was probably an inconvenience that they really could do without, frankly, thank you very much.

Especially because, in Britain, we don't bother all that much with "AC" - haven't had much use for it, don't you know.

And so, full of hot, frantic bodies, Clarks quickly became stifling and unpleasant.

And to cope with this seasonal madness, they implemented a system.

I remember it as if yesterday:

As you entered the shop, there was, by the door, a flat drum-shaped machine on a pedestal - that's "flat drum-shaped" on its side, which produced a string of small triangles of paper - arrowhead shaped - printed with a three digit number.

One was always protruding from its "mouth," so that the device almost looked like it was sticking its tongue out at you.

And you had to pull quite hard on this little slip of paper to tear it off, and when you did so another would appear behind it for the next person.

You'd then sit down with your paper-triangle and wait for your number to appear on a display that hung near the ceiling in the corner, and when it did a Clarks shopping assistant would appear to serve you.

If you didn't have the right ticket, you might as well have been invisible.

*But*, if you did, then, *like magic*, you were guaranteed an employee's *full* attention until the moment you walked out proudly clutching their merchandise, feeling like a victorious warrior after an especially hard-fought battle.

Now, why do I mention this?

Because, if we're not careful; if we're not paying attention to the holy Scriptures, we may mistake the Church's "Good News" as if it were a matter of simply pulling a ticket at Clarks.

That a simple prayer of confession one time - admitting wrong-going and a promise to trust Jesus - was all that "getting to Heaven" required.

And if that *is* what you think, then His teaching today must be a perplexing one indeed:

For to say "sorry!" to God for my sins, and to say that He is my Lord and Savior is the most easy thing in the world, right?

I just have to open my mouth.

So, what does He mean, then, by "carrying crosses" and building towers and going to war 'against another king' whose army is twice as large as my own?

*Those things sound like a lot of hard work.*

They're all physically-demanding, exhausting labors.

Stuff that, to do well, one would need to *prepare* for; to *train* for.

You can't just wander onto a battlefield and expect to survive.

*Especially* if the opposition outnumbers you two-to-one as in the scenario that Christ describes.

Now, *that* kind of fight is tough.

But not impossible:

Joshua and the Hebrews - and Jesus' audience would know what I'm about to say, because, if nothing else, the two men have, actually, the same name - *Yesh-ua* - Joshua and the Hebrews repeatedly - during their conquest of Canaan - took on and successfully defeated forces much, *much* larger than their own.

In fact, they hardly ever *weren't* - by a drastic measure - the underdog.

What was the difference, then?

How were they successful?

Because they approached the task of re-conquest with an unshakeable intentionality to see it through to the very end.

(The tribe of Judah at least, anyhow.)

It was their *commitment*.

Which means both that they were deliberate and disciplined.

"Discipline" being the root word, of course, for "disciple."

And it is only *disciples* who will get to enjoy the Kingdom of God when it is fully made manifest.

We need, in other words, to *evidence*; we need to *exhibit* that our confession of Christ crucified is more than just "paying it lip-service."

More than just a disturbance of air molecules produced by our tongues.

We have to demonstrate with *all* of our muscles that we *really* believe it; that we are *sincere*.

That's what the Gospel reading is about this morning.

Now, hearing this, you might be daunted.

We would prefer, wouldn't we, that salvation was a matter of simply taking a ticket and then passively waiting for what medieval theologians called, "The Final Consumation," right?

and becoming holy - which is being a disciple - will take a lot of effort.

But then God is on our side, *and nothing* is too difficult *for Him*.

When the Hebrews fought the Canaanites at the foot of Mount Tabor, God threw down 'the stars of Heaven' - so, meteors - at the opposition, and caused the river to flood its banks and soften the field so that their chariots got stuck: [Jdgs. 5:20-21].

In other words, He "checkmated" the Canaanites' tactical and technological advantages.

And we can expect and ask Him to do the same for us *if* what we're doing is in His name and for His glory and pleasure.

This isn't an either-or.

The Hebrews went to war *and God* went with them.

It was synergy, a tandem, a harmony.

*Our "war"* is mostly against ourselves - against apathy and laziness and doubt.

But we've the Holy Spirit who suffers none of those.

Which is why we should, like Saint Paul says to his friend Philemon, go to Him in prayer, saying, '[Please, r]efresh my heart in Christ.'

Because there we will find all that we need to succeed. [Phil. 20]

Let's take a moment to reflect.

