

[\[Link to audio recording.\]](#)

I don't know if you've noticed, but most of our readings this summer, especially those from the Gospel of Luke, have had to do with discipleship—they've had to do with what it means to follow Jesus. We've talked about wealth and economics, we've talked about hospitality, we've talked about the consequences to this kind of life. And that continues today.

Jesus talks to his disciples and makes it clear that following him will be costly. They shouldn't embark on it without weighing the risks and determining those are risks they're willing to take. He makes this point by asking two questions:

“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? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹Or 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? ³²If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.”ⁱ

In other words, which one of you would begin something without taking the proper steps to attempt to ensure success?

This week's first reading comes to us from the prophet Jeremiah. In it, we hear an account that is almost like a parable about a potter and their clay. Jeremiah is sent to the potter's house by the LORD. When he gets there, he finds the potter at work, but the vessel being created was spoiled. Instead of giving up or starting completely over, the potter reworks the clay into something else, something good.

The LORD asks Jeremiah, “Can I not do that with you, O House of Israel, just as this potter has done?”ⁱⁱ

We are presented with an image of God as the master potter, able to take raw clay and shape it up into just what God wants and needs it to be. ...but part of me wonders if there's a place for an apprentice. A place where we might be called to participate and work with God in this act of creation. A place where God can take our feeble attempts at vessels and reshape them into something good.

Let me share with you why I wonder this.

Lately, my social media feeds have been full of pottery. I don't know why. I don't know what I clicked on or what I watched or interacted with, but all of the internet algorithms now believe I want *all* of the pottery content.

In the past week or so, I've seen a lot of videos of potters at their wheels, throwing pots, sometimes just showing how they work, other times giving tips or trouble shooting common issues. I can't say that I've never worked with a pottery wheel or with clay—in middle school, a group from my home congregation went up to Holden Village for a week and one of the activities I got to do was pottery! Still, though, I am a novice in every sense of the word. And what these videos have taught me is that there are sooo many factors that go into making ceramic art.

If you're a baker, you know that it's a science. The chemistry of the ingredients is vital for things to rise or fall as you need them to. The temperature of the room as you're preparing ingredients or the humidity can wreak havoc on your final product. There are a dozen or more variables you must always keep in mind.

From what I can tell, pottery is not all that different. One must account for the temperature of the room, as well as the humidity, the temperature of the clay itself, the amount of water used, the amount of clay used, the composition of that clay, the speed of the wheel, the pressure of the hands...and probably lots of other things I don't even know enough about to forget. A master potter would be able to hold all these things together, almost as second nature. A novice would have to plan much more.

Which takes me back to Jesus' words earlier: "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?" Maybe he could also ask, "What apprentice potter would plan to throw a pot without taking into account all the factors?" They would pay extra attention to that amount of clay, to amount of water they added as they went, to the pressure of their hands and they pressed and shaped. They would do all they could to mitigate any potential issues before they arose.

But we know that we can't mitigate everything, right? There is no piece of our lives that will always, one hundred percent of the time, go perfectly just because we plan for it. This potter could get startled by a noise and push the wall of a pot in. They might drop it on its way to dry or on its way to the kiln. A bug crawled in unnoticed while the clay was still wet and left its imprint. These are all things that the potter has no control over.

I think this is important to remember because even as Jesus tells all who want to follow him to "know the cost," in a sense that's a really hard ask. It's hard to know how much something is going to cost you until you get there. It's hard to prepare for every eventuality. There are always things you simply can't plan for.

But that's where the Master Potter steps in.

When we are ready to throw up our hands and give up because this piece we spent time and effort and energy on is spoiled—it's cracked or bent or falling apart—the Master Potter takes it, re-works it, re-forms it, and makes it into something good.

I really like this idea as a metaphor for our life of faith, for our life as disciples of Christ: we try to plan, we try to make sure things will go smoothly, we think we know what is asked of us.

We do our best to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, free the oppressed. But we overstep. Or we don't go far enough. Or we inadvertently harm instead of help. Mistakes are bound to happen. But God know that.

And God is there to help take our missteps and mistakes and transform them into good. Yes, it's good to have an idea of what the cost will be, but even when we miscalculate, God is there to make it work.

And it's because we know God is there to support us that we can boldly *embark* on those things we've been called to do as Jesus' disciples. We can take the risks. We can be the hands and feet of God in a world that desperately needs it.

In the beginning, God made order and beauty out of chaos and an empty void.

Just think what God can do with our earnest, if feeble, efforts to usher in the reign of God.

Amen.

ⁱ Luke 14:28-32.

ⁱⁱ Jeremiah 18:5b.