**9-8-19**

 **Reformed!**

**By Rev. Sheryl Stewart**

Jeremiah 18:1-11 Philemon 1: 1-21 Luke 14: 25-33

RR: Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18

**Summary: To be reformed, I must do more than be a member of the Protestant movement and turn away from sin. Re-formed is remade, and my Potter will not stop till His watermark (baptism) shows clearly.**

 I’m glad I swapped Sundays with Jim and got these lectionary readings. For some reason known only to God, when I read Jeremiah’s experience with God at the potter’s house, I suddenly realized that I could take this very personally! Of course, God was speaking to Israel at the time and was making the point that He is not bound by His love or His promises if there is a change in His children’s behavior which He needs to address. God gives Jeremiah this warning so that people will have time to reform themselves before He must crumple their lives like a glob of clay turning out wrong on the spinning wheel of time and make something new. If you read just one more verse, you’ll see that God already knows how Israel will answer, but God still tries!

 It struck me that the God who knew me and shaped me in my mother’s womb also knew that, as the wheel of time spun me around, there would come a time that the vessel He was making would become dangerously imperfect and He would have to make me into a totally different vessel if I were to bear His watermark. A human potter places a watermark on each piece like an artist signing each painting so that everyone will know who made it. My divine Potter’s watermark is called “baptism” and He won’t stop re-forming me until His image is clear and He has a vessel of perfect use and beauty.

 This was true of Israel which had to be crumpled by generations of captivity and the very temple destroyed before they could come home to build new lives and a new temple. This was also true of Onesimus, Philemon’s runaway slave who became a Christian, encountered Paul in prison, and is sent back home by the apostle to resume his service – this time as a brother in Christ. Things look like they will return to an old pattern; yet all three (former slave, former master, and Paul himself) are all indentured to the same God through Jesus. Lives are being totally reformed, reshaped, by God.

 The Gospel passage has Jesus challenging us to put God first. Count the cost, for it is not cheap or easy. I need to love God more than myself, more than my freedom, more than my independence, more than my husband, more than my country, more than my doctrines and being right, and more than you. I am not self-made if I am made by God. I am no more a master than Philemon or Paul was. I am not only made; I am a handmaiden!

 Yet, I am no more a simple servant than Onesimus was for I am also your sister in Christ. I am a new creation with the watermark of my Potter. There are no longer distinctions between Jew and Greek, rich or poor, slave or free, wise or foolish, powerful or humble, male or female. All of us give up everything we are in order to gain the pearl of great price: the salvation which comes from the obedience of Christ on the Cross. That Cross reforms, reshapes, remakes each of us and engraves the Potter’s watermark on each varied vessel.

 God’s image in me is not fully clear yet. There is still transformation to come. Nonetheless, I have counted the cost and God is more than worth all I have and all I am. I think this was true for Paul, for Philemon, for Onesimus, and true – on the Cross and beyond – for Jesus Himself. So, I encourage you: keep giving your life to Jesus and let Him reform you. You will not be disappointed, and neither will God!