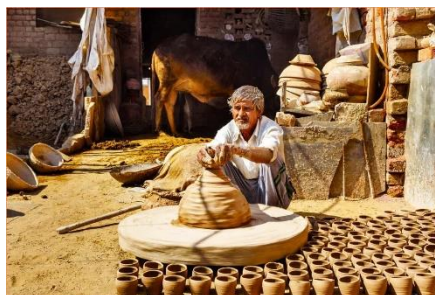


Sunday Thought

4th September 2022 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Jeremiah 18: 1 - 11
Psalm 139: 1 - 6, 13 - 18
Philemon 1 - 21
Luke 14: 25 - 33



Pots of Grace

Today's Thoughts are all about the *Grace of God*. I sometimes think of divine *Grace* as the constant ebb and flow of God's love, like the tide sweeping in to gather all our worlds' detritus and carrying it back into God's heart leaving the shore clean and changed. Jeremiah had a similar picture of God's grace one morning in his home town of Anathoth just three miles north of Jerusalem. The Lord sent him down to the Potters' House to get a message for the nation. While there, surrounded by pots of many shapes for a great variety of uses, perhaps Jeremiah's conversation distracted the potter who lost concentration. The prophet observed how the craftsman did not attempt to amend his spoiled work but rolled the same portion of clay ready to start all over again. Watching carefully, Jeremiah had his message from the Lord to give to the whole nation! It was a word to a crippled, sick, idolotrous people, totally askew from God's designed laws and purposes. The message was one of both pain and hope, of destruction and renewal. Jeremiah was to tell his people how they would reap a harvest of their injustice, idolatry and failures, issuing in poverty, famine, disease and enemy conquest. However, this could open the way for the nation's cleansing, reconstruction and spiritual renewal. Of course, as with all national times of renewal it would begin with *inner* changes as the hearts and lives of its people were renewed by a flowing tide of *God's Grace*'

Jeremiah had made the *Gospel* discovery which would find its fulfillment in Jesus centuries later as a word of hope for every life - for the whole world! It is a simple truth from the Lord still - *Let me sweep into your life - renewing you - refashioning you like a a pot, ready to be filled with my saving grace*. The apostle Paul uses this same image in his letter to Christians in Corinth when he says [I Cor. 4/7] *This is what Christ has worked in our lives. We are like common clay pots, but we are holding in us the treasures of God's Grace*.

There is evidence of God's grace in the reading today from which we learn the story of Onesimus. Paul's letter is addressed to Philemon, an outstanding member of the church at Colossae in the Lycus valley (Turkey). Onesimus was owned by Philemon, but had risked his life by running away and breaking his contract of slavery. Like many other run-away slaves, Onesimus made his way to Rome where he came into contact with the Church and with Paul who wrote this letter. In it he begged Philemon to re-instate his slave, bearing in mind that he was now a Christian brother whom Paul regarded as his *child in the Gospel*.

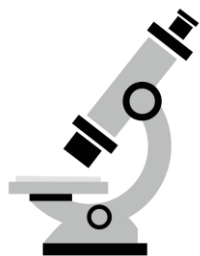
This letter is an amazing witness to the grace of God. It could be Jesus writing. *'Onesimus has become a spiritual son to me. I would love to keep him here with me because we have been a blessing to each other, but I must send him back. He will come with my love and I will be responsible for all costs and the losses to yourself.'* It is even more wonderful to realise how the whole Christian community had become like a workshop filled with many clay pots holding measures of Jesus's love and practical grace. The story illustrates how the Jesus-renewal of individuals in the gracious unity of the church could transform the whole world! And we have been so long about it!

Perhaps that is because, while it is comparatively simple to become a Christian it is far from easy to go on BEING one. It could not have been painless for Onesimus to face his master, the Christian community and his fellow slaves. That is the message from our Gospel reading. Jesus is clear that discipleship means giving him priority in our lives, whatever it costs or however heavy a cross we may have to carry personally to follow him. It is not more than he asked of himself as he took the road towards Golgotha where the *tide of his grace* carried away the world's life-rubbish – and mine!. Contemporary pictures of the oceans and their hidden life being destroyed by suffocating blankets of rubbish give us some idea of the price God still pays to pick up our detritus!!

It is right that Paul ends his letter to Philemon and the church in Colossae with a blessing – *May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.* We use it still as a community blessing. May we never say it lightly. We are asking for Jesus to graciously engulf us in the constant ebb and flow of God's love – changing us into individual Christ-shaped vessels, serving him in one gracious community. One Pot filled from many smaller pots!!



A prayer of Grateful Wonder [based on Psalm 139]



Lord, my God, I realise you've had my life under a microscope!
You have a complete view of everything about me.
You track my actions, thoughts, and words
both when I feel you close and when you're at the back of my mind.

It's because I know something of the depths and heights of your love
that I have no fear of your intimate searches.
It's been like this since before I was born.

It's overwhelming to know you are personally involved with all my being.
It blows my mind to realise this is true for all lives. and all creation.
Enveloped in your gracious Spirit I can wake each morning,
knowing you are still with me, and your gracious care has not changed.
Nor will it! Thank you, my Lord.