

## *Have Thine Own Way*

First Congregational Church Branford  
9/8/19; Jeremiah 18:1-6, Luke 14:25-35  
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The word that came to the prophet Jeremiah from the Lord: <sup>2</sup>‘Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.’ <sup>3</sup>So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. <sup>4</sup>The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

<sup>5</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to me: <sup>6</sup>‘Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done?’ says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

In the Gospel of Luke,

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus; and he turned and said to them, ‘Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” Or 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? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions. ‘Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’

Jesus can really put it to us, can’t he, telling us to hate everybody?! Last week he was all about turning the dinner table seating arrangement upside down. Doesn’t Jesus know it’s the beginning of the church year and we’d appreciate something a little lighter?! As I’ve said, Jesus isn’t always the warm and fuzzy “come to me all you who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest” Jesus we’ve come to know and love -- he has tough words for us to hear occasionally.

But, no, no one needs to go off and hate their family to be a disciple of Jesus Christ! This was the early days of a new religious movement; the disciples had to be **clear** about their loyalty, or the movement wouldn't have survived. Okay?

What Jesus needed from them at that time was to leave everything behind that was pulling and drawing them away from him - he needed to be first in their life. See, he knows what can happen in a family – that it can become so tight that members will sort of end up following one another instead of him - do what sister says, do what papa says, instead of God. In that day, as well as not that long ago, people followed their *parents* more than they followed Christ. As an aside, what we do today is follow our *children* before we follow Christ. The child comes before God, before the church, even before parents themselves. I sometimes remind parents how airlines say to get your oxygen mask in place *before* your child's! You have to put yourself first to be of use! The other tragedy in this is that the child hasn't learned to place God first; and then years down the road when they have their own child, they won't teach their child about God.

Jesus still wants and needs our loyalty, he wants to know *he* is first, then our family, then our children. In 2019 he's like this: put Jesus first, put the church first, *lay this foundation in your life* - and then add your family in there. *They're second*. Hard to hear, huh? But, he's like, what's the point in all of this (this church, this worship space, our programming), unless you have the commitment, the passion, the faith, and finances to keep it all going? It's like what happens at the beginning of the church year - we begin with excitement and as the year progresses, people steadily drop off. Other things become more important... They take the place of God...

He wants us to pay the cost of discipleship, of true commitment... *and* here's the good news! - *if* we give him that, *if* we show him that, he *promises* a joy and a peace beyond our imagination. Our life will run more smoothly, because we've placed it in his hands. But, we have to show him he's first.

We took Abe to Bryant University in Rhode Island last Saturday, and he's struggling. He loves his classes and professors, but he's feeling alone and lonely. I reminded him to put God first everyday, before his worry, anxiety, and feeling lonely. Today I reminded him that this is the Lord's Day, to pay him allegiance, to honor him - first. Each and every day. To work on placing God as the priority over and above everything else and then see what happens. I suspect, if he does this, if he pays the cost, his life is going to run more smoothly this week. He won't be quite as upset.

While Jesus may not require the *exact* same loyalty from us in 2019... the truth is, look around you – this worship space contained 500 worshipers with two

services in the last century..... we now have 80-90 on Sunday through the program year. Maybe we need to be a clearer about our loyalty!

Something that hurts church commitment is that we can pick and choose what we want to do as a Christian. A friend of mine calls it being a Cafeteria Christian. "I'll go to worship when they're doing such and such - I'll have that. That looks good. I'll attend a week night event when it's something I care about. - I'll have that."..... Jesus is looking for a little more conviction from us, a little more support for the church.

Why does Jesus talk about salt? He says a lack of saltiness, a lack of seasoning, is blandness and complacency. It was no time to be complacent. Jesus was warning them about the coming persecution and trials that the followers of Jesus would face once he went away. "Be salty," he says. Be tough, stand up for me and what you believe in, or what I did is all going to be lost. Thank GOD they stood up, and so 2,000 years later we remember him. They paid the cost. Today, he would say, *this* is all going to go away unless you put me and the church first. If you believe in your church, stand up for it. Support it. Don't say, "oh, I won't come in the summer, I won't come on Children's Sunday, Rally Sunday, Confirmation Sunday, Baptism Sunday, or events through the week, or a specific worship time doesn't work for me.".... All of that feels like putting oneself first... instead of God, instead of the church. Ya know? There's a **cost** to discipleship.

Let's go to Jeremiah. Jeremiah tells us that God wants to rework us into another vessel, as seems good to Him, saying, "I can do with you what the potter does."

The spiritual life, and church life work best when we admit we're clay, the church is clay, and we say, "Mold me and make me after your will while I am waiting, humbly and still". We say to our Heavenly Potter, I don't know what's best for me, what's best for my church, so Lord God, make of me, make of First Congregational a new vessel. Have your way in me, in us. Lord God. Help us to let go of all that is no longer useful and mold and make the new.

Church, you are good. You are beloved. I just think that more and more, we have to surrender to God's will for each of us, and for our church, not our own will for our lives and for our church. I know your Pastoral Search Committee has tried to be as prayerful as they can be in the development of the church profile. They've been very careful because they want to attract the one who most meets the church's current needs. I pray that that minister is right now, today, in preparation of seeking a new call, is saying to God, mold me and make me after your will, while I am yielded, waiting and still. Imagine if you put THAT church and THAT minister together. Whoosh! I mean!

One last thing to share: The Christian church has survived because it contributes something meaningful and eternal to each generation. I can't imagine a time in which this Jesus message would become useless... Unless the people stop putting him first. Think about what he did for you: He gave you new life, and, he opened the door of First Congregational where you found a spiritual home where people *deeply* care for you, where you *matter*. What are you going to show him? Who are you going to tell?

Great, living, loving God, "Mold us and make us after your will, while we are waiting yielded and still." Amen.

Congregational Hymn, "Have Thine Own Way."