

**Measure Twice, Cut Once;** a sermon in response to Jeremiah 18:1-11 and Luke 14:25-33 by Rev. Scot McCachren at the First Presbyterian Church of East Hampton, September 8, 2019.

A large passenger ship was in the middle of a voyage out in the middle of the ocean. After being on the water for a while, one of the passengers found that he was getting bored. It was a nice ship, a well-run ship, and everyone else seemed to be having a good time, but this one passenger felt like he needed a diversion. Now, his cabin was on the lowest level of the ship – and so he decided it would be fun to dig a hole in the floor of his cabin. So he dug for a while and soon, as you would expect, water starts flooding in – and the ship begins to sink. When the crew realizes what’s happening they rush to the man’s cabin. **“What are you doing?!”** they yell. The man looks up from his hole and says, **“What?! It’s my cabin. I paid for it.”** And the ship sinks to the bottom of the sea. +++ +++ That’s a story shared recently by Rabbi AMA-kai Lauu-LaVEE (Amichai Lau-Lavie) on Krista Tippett’s podcast “On Being.” Rabbi Lauu-LaVEE is doing some really innovative work in New York City with the community’s spiritual life – recovering a sense of the sacred all around us and “reinventing the... meaning of **‘we.’**” +++ How can we expect to cultivate a deep sense of community when we no longer share a sense of cohesion... when we no longer have a shared **vision** of who **WE are** as a community... when life among others feels like “every person for themselves?” +++ Is it possible for us each to “march to our own drummer” and still expect to be spiritually fed by our community? +++ +++ This points to the fatal flaw of the ship’s passenger:: he **was** part of a community – a community that relied on each other more than any of them were really aware – a community that needed each passenger to willingly limit their own actions in favor of the common good. It just doesn’t work for each person to do whatever they want to – according to their own priorities – and expect a good outcome. +++ There’s **something bigger** than our priorities... and to keep from **sinking** (literally and figuratively), we need to put our own needs aside and become a part of it.

In her commentary on today’s gospel reading, Debie Thomas discusses Rabbi Lauu-LaVEE’s interview and his parable of the ship passenger. The story “names the same uncomfortable truth Jesus names,” Thomas writes. “When it comes to the life of faith, we want to have our cake and eat it, too. But we can’t.” We want to have **our own** loyalties and priorities... we want to exercise **our own** freedoms however we see fit – to do what **we** want to do when **we** want to do it – or to do **nothing at all!** ... BUT... **still** have the **benefit** of living in community... the **joy** of being part of a church family. As Thomas says, “We want to embrace a Christianity that doesn’t involve costly choices. We want to **drift along** as we always have. We want to experience Jesus the healer, Jesus the savior, Jesus the friend – but not so much Jesus the radical, counter-cultural prophet who [makes demands for our attention and our time. We don’t care so much for Jesus the captain, who] barges into **our** private cabins [when **we** start digging our holes] to ask the... unbearable question: **“What are you doing?!”** as our whole ship rides low in the water – threatening to sink – because of what **we** chose to do... +++ ... or – **just as often**... because of what we chose **NOT to do**... Our community and our church need us to **roll up our sleeves and get busy** more than any other time I can remember in my lifetime, and Jesus is calling us to respond.

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This is a tough passage – one of those passages that forces us to remember that Jesus was deadly serious about his mission to remake the world – yes, he was gentle, forgiving, loving – all the appealing things we love about him – but Jesus was also uncompromising about his own focus, commitment, and faithfulness:: And..., he calls his followers **to be the same way**. +++ In our reading, Jesus is talking to large crowds and he doesn’t pull any punches. *What does it take to be his disciple?* You can’t have your cake and eat it, too! To be a disciple of Jesus our healer, savior, and friend – we also have to be a disciple of the Jesus who turns the world upside down, the Jesus who is in the trenches fighting for social justice; you have to be a disciple of the Jesus who rails against the wealthy who seize power and pull the levers of control to their own benefit at the expense of the poor. +++ To be a disciple... of Jesus Christ,... you have to model your life after the one who fed multitudes of hungry people all day and into the evening... until he was so weary that he had to go away... by himself... to pray,... recover,... and prepare for the next challenge. +++ +++ And **how** do you do that? How do you follow in the footsteps of the Messiah?? +++ Well, that’s what Jesus is making very clear this morning. We start by giving up everything else we value to follow **him**. – Our lives, our fortunes, our time, our talent should all be oriented towards Christ. +++ In fact, he’s telling us we have to stop thinking in terms of what’s **OURS**. **Our** priorities – **Our** comfort – **Our** safety – **Our** freedom... +++ “It’s **my** cabin – I can dig in the floor if I want to...” +++ ... +++ There **is no** **“MY cabin!”** +++ **This whole ship belongs to God**. If I want to follow Christ, as Thomas points out, “every choice I make,... every tribalism I cherish,... every idol I worship,... every possession I hoard... – [it all] affects the entire vessel. There is no ‘us’ or ‘them’ on the ship of

Christian discipleship. There is only 'we' – a holy, God-ordained 'we,' ... [an] inclusive, enormous, consequential, and *fragile* [we]" ... +++ a "we" that scuttles and sinks to the bottom when we forget it. "Jesus' claim on [your] life, in other words, is radical and absolute: it relativizes every other claim. *Every* other claim. Period." That's why Jesus tells us today that your attachment to "father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and *even life itself*" is secondary – derivative – to discipleship in Christ. +++ **If you can't cannot carry the cross you "cannot be my disciple."**

It *IS* a tough message. And Jesus *knows* it's tough. He *knows* it takes work – and planning – and commitment. He *knows* we won't get it right every time. That's why he tells us to dig deep – work hard at it – take an inventory – grow, mature, pray, until we *have* what it takes. Like a builder working out his costs and resources before he starts a tower... like a king, sitting down to consider his troop strength and supply lines before waging war. +++ +++ You can't just *stumble into* discipleship – you can't just show up for the grace – for the forgiveness – for the sense of belonging... without also *showing up* to build his Church – to serve his children – to change the world – to do the work:: NOT if you want to be a true disciple. +++ +++ ||| +++ When we do tool and safety training for youth preparing to go on RISE mission trips, one of the principles we repeat over and over is to "Measure Twice, Cut Once." It primarily has to do with cutting, obviously: whether its wood, skirting, steel roofing, etc. It costs nothing to measure a board twice: just pull that tape measure out – make a mark on the wood where you need to cut – then check the tape again to make its secure – that it hasn't slipped... - remind yourself of the measurement you need – then look again. Is the mark in the right place? If so – you're ready to cut. It costs nothing. +++ BUT – once you make the cut – once you turn that board into two shorter boards – there's no going back. +++ "Measure Twice, Cut Once." +++ It's true in carpentry, metalwork, masonry... but then, once the principle is engrained into the young people – we use it to coach them on other things... like choosing our words carefully, responding to anger, helping someone with a problem. It costs nothing to think twice – but once you speak – once you lash out – once you turn a cold shoulder – it's impossible to really take it back. +++ "Measure Twice, Cut Once." +++ It's a singular way of thinking – it's a discipline – a strategy for life. And like building a tower... Like waging a war... ||| ... like being a disciple of Jesus Christ, ... you can't just stumble into it. +++ It's not just something you *do* (when you remember to). ... Discipleship is a way of living – a way of *being* – with a singular focus on Christ. +++ It determines who you are and what you become.

This is what Jeremiah is getting at in his famous "potter" metaphor in today's Old Testament reading. The Lord continues to work and rework us like soft clay in the hands of a master craftsman. But, if you notice in the reading, God doesn't shape us according to what the Lord *wants* us to be. – No, our changing shape – the form we take in the potter's hands – who we become – has a lot to do with the choices we make. :: A kingdom that God declared would be destroyed changed its ways and was spared – on the other hand, a kingdom the Divine Potter was preparing to build up turns away from God and so loses its chance to be remade. +++ And God's own people – the Jews of Judah and Jerusalem – have grown apart from God and taken up evil ways. And so, the potter is preparing a disaster for them – but Jeremiah tells them it's not too late – it's never too late – to turn back to the Lord. +++ In the potter's hands, our own faithfulness and goodness become shaped into our very being – part of DNA. Like discipleship in Christ, living in the Lord literally *shapes* you into who you are.

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So, this morning, Christ gives you a choice. Are you ready to put him in front of all your other priorities – or not? Are you ready to show up and put some skin in the game, building his Church – serving his children – doing his work with a singular focus on Christ – or not? Our answer doesn't just determine what we will do, but who we are – who we will be. +++ The Divine Potter works it into the stuff we are made of. +++ The Good News is that Christ never asks more of you than he himself gave. Every moment of his life and death gives example to the heart – the uncompromising resolve – the generosity – that he calls his disciples to give. +++ But it takes focus – and it takes action. You don't just stumble into discipleship – it's a choice. Let's make that choice together this morning. Let's take an inventory of ourselves – then, grow, mature, pray, until we *have* what it takes. +++ Like the general preparing for war:: What adjustments do you need to make – what capacities do you need to measure – resources to deploy? Like the builder preparing to construct a tower:: Make a blueprint of the time you can commit, the foundations you might lay, the strengths you have to offer? +++ +++ Prepare yourself for work that's bigger than yourself. – Make a difference... +++ Measure Twice... then start cutting in the name of Christ.

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.