September 8th, 2019 

Jeremiah 18:1-11 Pastor Jenny Lee, Ph.D.

Upper St. Croix Parish UMC

**“The Potter & the Clay”**

At first Sunday service, since I came to the USA, I have confirmed that God called me as a minister of the church. I could join in a project of planting a new church. While I was studying in the Ph.D. program, I had been serving the Korean church. The church started with five young adults with me.

Meanwhile, my senior pastor gave me an extra job, which is a coordinator of Korean young adult conference, named “2030 Conference.” The 2030 Conference is a leadership conference for Korean young adult of the ages twenties and thirties. The Conference had been held in the local church every Thanksgiving season when my senior pastor was in Urban, Illinois. The Conference began to take care of Korean students who did not have a place to stay and to eat during Thanksgiving season. The senior pastor gave them a home and provided them food. At first there were gathered 26 students, but later on, more than 100 students came in. After the senior pastor was appointed at the church in Chicago, he wanted the Conference to hold in Chicago. That’s why he asked me to work on that.

However, at that time, I got an excellent opportunity to present my article at the American Academy of Religion (AAR), which is the most significant academic seminar. The seminar would be held the same season with the 2030 Conference. If I would work at the Conference, I could not go to the seminar. So then I would prefer to go to the seminar rather than the Conference. The pastor decided to hire the other person for the Conference.

At that night, I had a dream. In the dream, I was reading the story of Judges in the Bible. In the dream, when I was reading about Judge Gideon and his three hundred people, God said to me, “I chose three hundred people out of thirty-two thousand to save my people.” (Judges 7:1-8, NIV). God continued to say, “You want to study to receive a Ph.D. degree. However, I want you now, even though you do not have a Ph.D. degree or a pastor's license. If I say that I do not want to use you for my people after you have everything you want, what do you do? Why do you not think that I can choose whomever I want and whenever I want? I need you now." It was clear even though it was in my dream. This dream made me recognize the omnipotent sovereignty of God.

In the scripture, you may notice the sovereignty of God as well. For Jeremiah, the sovereignty of God is essential in his life. We remember his calling story; Jeremiah Chapter 1: 5, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” Jeremiah’s faithfulness to God is to obey God. God says to him, “come, go down to the potter’s house” (1:2). He had to get up and go immediately. He went to the potter’s house as God said to him. Jeremiah saw that “the potter was working at his wheel. 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” (18:3-4). In the short parable story, we may notice the messages of God.

First of all, God’s work has a purpose. “There he was working at his wheel” (3). The potter was not playing with the clay. It was his work. It was severe, which means there was a purpose in it. As the potter was making something with his intention with the clay, God has a purpose in creating each of us whether we recognize or not. The purpose of God in us is essential.

The second, the creation of God was a good thing gone bad. “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” (4). As the potter tried to make a good thing until he satisfied as good, God created all creatures as good. Genesis 1: 25, after God created every being, God said it repeatedly, “It was good.” After God made human, God said, “it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). If the good thing is gone to bad, it has been re-created until he is satisfied with his purpose. Verse 4 says, “He reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to him.” The potter was working something with the clay for his serious purpose. The potter could make a good thing with the clay. If the clay goes out of his mission, he may want to destroy the vessel, and he makes it another one with the clay. We may notice the implication. If we go for out of God’s purpose, God may want to pluck up, and break down and destroy us to remake.

God gave us the sign he can do it through Noah’s flood. However, we know God’s promise of the rainbow and a new covenant through the Cross of Jesus. We already experienced God’s amazing grace. Through Noah’s flood and the Cross of Jesus, God showed us already how much he loves us. Therefore, we should remember God’s free love which gave us his only Son, and his only Son obeyed God up to die on the Cross because he loves us. Even though God created us as perfect humanity, we went out of God’s purpose. Nevertheless, God tried to remake us as very good to him again and again. Therefore, unless we go away from our savior Jesus Christ, we are the masterpiece of God.

The purpose of God to create humanity is expressed in Ephesians 2:10, “for we are what God [he] has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” God made humanity for good works. What are the good works of God? Jesus said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (John 6:29). Yes, God’s work, in other words, the purpose of God to create humanity is to believe in Jesus Christ. If you believe in Jesus Christ, we should follow Jesus’ teachings. That’s our responsibility as Christians.

The apostle Paul said, “Who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, 'why have you made me like this?’ has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use?” (Romans 9:20-21). We should recognize the sovereign of God. I hope we all are in Jesus Christ for good works of God. I believe that the reason I am here with you, and the reason you are here in this congregation are all for the good works of God.

God may destroy us, or God may exalt us for his glory. Whether we are in the suffering of life, or the joy of life, do remember of God. If we are in Jesus Christ, because God is merciful God, God indeed cares of us. Please sense the presence of God in your life, whether you are in suffering or joy. God never leaves you alone. God is there always for you because you are the masterpiece of God.

After I woke up from my dream of Gideon, I remembered that I swore to God that 'whatever God asks me I will do it, and wherever God sends me, I will go there’ when God healed me to walk again. I completely forgot how I could walk again. Whether I am in joy or suffering, I belong to God. I decided that I do not go for my study, and the work of God became my priority. I reorganized the Conference as a national wide using an online system. The 2030 Conference began as a Methodist Young Adult Conference in the local church, but it is open nationwide, beyond the walls of church denominations, ecumenically in the United States. Since I worked on that, the Conference has about five hundred attendees and about forty staff members every year. Through the Conference, the Korean church gained more members. Now the church has more than one hundred fifty.

After I received a Ph.D. degree, I prepared for an ordained ministry of United Methodist Church. Some people laughed at me because they thought that my choice was foolish. They talked to me if you have chosen for your study, instead of the Conference, you might be a teacher in a seminary already. However, I trust God, rather than people. God made me confirm that I belong to God through the event. No regret my choice for the work of God because God is always with me. I gained God rather than the glory of the world.

If you concern on your choice, do not hesitate between your way and God’s way. The way of God is your right way. God is the potter, and we are clay. God who made you guides you in the right direction. Trust God and stay in Jesus Christ. The way looks like detouring on your life may be a short cut toward God.

**Thanks be to God, Amen.**