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

There is no Easy Button, but...

You've probably seen the commercial.....there are several versions of it. The last one I saw was the "Back to School" edition.....when the older son comes through the back door of the kitchen holding in his hand a school supply list. He whispers his story to his little sister egging her on to watch as he fully expects their mother will respond with a certain amount of drama. The list is tediously specific: A calculator, flash drive, pencils.

We know enough about these lists to understand the premise of this commercial....the request for a certain brand of crayon, two red pens, two blue, a pad of notebook paper but not the yellow kind and with pre-punched holes and perforated if possible.

I remember one teacher's request.....more a demand as it was written. She wanted a specific brand of Kleenex tissue.....the ones with added lotion in the cube style box rather than the flat box. Her request meant another store, another line, another day. She didn't that item on the list.....it was just too hard, at least in that moment.

Back to the commercial thoughthe older son is still whispering to his sister as a few flash back scenes reveal the history of past overwhelmed reactions of the mom. She always seems to be in the kitchen cooking. One year she drops a carton of eggs, the next a bag of flour.....then a bowl of batter.

So.....filled with great expectations the son braces himself to see what cooking disaster will happen this year.

But because this is a commercial for an office supply store this year the mom is prepared for the news. She already knows well in advance that she will not have to rush about with anxiety or take out a loan in order to get her children ready for the new school year.

So.....as the son announces his "back to school" needs the mom quickly but very calmly pulls out a big red and white easy button and pushes it. Taaa daaa.....No worries. No reactions. No mini disasters or drama. Like magic all is well as the announcer proclaims, "That was easy."

How many of you want an "easy button"?

Oh....I for one do.

There are many days I'd push that button to make things easier! If only life had access to an instant magic easy button. We wouldn't have worries to fret over....the burden of nagging doubt would disappear.

Debates could end.....conflicts cease....broken relationships heal.

If only.....

if only....we had an easy button to push
when the pressures started to mount.

Speaking of pressures....

Like many of you I've lived my whole life in what is known as the Bible Belt. Last week I was welcomed with these words..... "You are now living in the buckle of the Bible Belt. That's why you see so many tall steeples on so many corners!"

I know my home state Texas is part of Bible Belt too....but now I'm not sure what part of the belt it is now.

Perhaps it's on the backside of the belt or the part right under the love handles!

Where ever it is I can attest that someone somewhere along the line has tightened the belt one too many notches....and it needs to be loosened.

No matter what part of the Bible Belt we might live in.....passages like the ones we read today become fodder for all kinds of faith teachings promising easy, black and white, right and wrong, heaven and hell, in and out, them and us, righteous and wretched, saved and lost, better than thou believing.

God loves....God judges.

This kind of easy button life, thinking, praying....easy button theology.....has a way of luring us in.....making faith seem so simple.

Do this and God will love you.

Do that and you will be squashed like a gnat.

You do right you get glory....you do wrong you get fried.

And as sketchy as it all may seem at times.....this easy button Bible belt theology continues to have mass appeal.....

because it has tapped into the cultural angst of our modern time and made faith in God's love as one dimensional as an infomercial.

It's a profitable theology because we American's crave easiness. If it were not so then the airwaves would not be filled with so many "*easy button*" shenanigans selling us products and plans promising grandiose results for nothing.

Weight loss programs allowing one to eat anything in sight and not exercise; financial schemes promising little work but millions in the bank; or flimsy products designed to simply every possible aspect of life.

Mostly we know an instant, fix all easy button does not exist.

Mostly we know in order to get from one place in life to the next takes a certain amount of effort, energy, imagination, determination, integrity, and joy.

Mostly we know digging down deep, enduring hardship with patience, trusting beyond hope.....and a bit of struggle and sweat is involved if we are to make it through the wilderness of life to the Promised Land of life.

Mostly..... we know..... there is no easy button!

Christ did not live, minister, and die that we might not have to deal with the realities of our lives. Christ died and raised on that Easter morning because of the realities of our lives....

because God knows who we are and what we struggle with deep down. God knows what we are wrestling with.....no matter how much effort we make to keep our stories from being heard or known. God sees past our failures and wrongdoing.....our arrogance and stubbornness.

As one new friend said to me this week....Christ didn't die on the cross that we might be shamed.

Not at all.....this whole Christ story we inherit is not about a magic easy button....it's not about shallow love that is yanked out of our hands the second we mess up.

The Christ story is about the deep depths of our living....and all that comes with it.

There is no easy button.....but there is grace.....

There is no easy button.....but there is grace with depth and width enough to meet us right where we are in life.

There is no easy button but there is grace with power and persistence enough to endure our fear and stubbornness.....grace with compassion enough to not give up until we are molded into the shape God intends.

Mostly we know these things.....but oh how we need reminding....how we need encouragement in the face of so many words and actions in this world that leave us in a wasteland of fret and consternation.

Mostly we know God formed us and has power to reform us. It is what we say we believe. Reformed always to be reformed.

And as God goes about this re-forming.....My friends.....we need each other.....we need each other's stories and songs, prayers and laughter, histories and dreams. We need each other in all the varieties God has created.

You have a song, you have a song.

You have a story, you have a story.

You have a dream and you have a dream.....

and because your song and your story and your dream are different

we learn the depth of the Christ story when we share them.

Together we stand in the potter's where God is the potter. And on the wheel of spinning clay.....our lives take shape.

As a dear friend of mine writes..... "life on the potter's wheel is an ongoing process of thinking, reflecting, doing and becoming."

Having heard this.....It is well past time for us Presbyterians to spend some time in the Potters house. We live in an era when there is no other choice but to submit to the on going movement of God's hands as we are shaped and re-shaped.

It is well past time for us Presbyterian's to be satisfied with the way we were and not invest our minds and hearts to God's making.....to God's shaping....to God's reforming.

And yes, the Bible says today

that sometimes it requires that we put down

the things we love to hold on too.....

especially those things that stand in our way of embracing each other.....

especially those things that get in the way of God's grace to shape deeper, richer stories.

We need each other and it is in this place when we come together to move through the elements of liturgy where God's grace bubbles and springs forth. We need each other.

We need the mathematicians mind and the artists heart....

We need the majesty of the formal and the good news of the down home.

We need the passion of speaking up for what is right

and the silence..... that we might encounter what God has to say.

God indeed is molding and re-shaping us yet again....and it is time my friends to take the depth of the past

and the joy of the present and the imagination of the future

and live as God intends for us to live!