“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether you have enough to complete it?” Luke is pointing us toward the cost of discipleship, so let’s talk about costs. Let’s say we’re planning for a guest speaker to come and facilitate a retreat here at the church. What are the costs? We need to consider the speaker’s fee, travel and lodging for the speaker, the cost of food and supplies for the day of the event, perhaps we’ll need to rent furniture or equipment. We need to estimate how many people will attend, and what people are willing to pay for this type of event, so we can estimate the cost of subsidizing the event, what it will cost us beyond what people are willing to pay. We are responsible. Which of you does not first sit down and estimate the costs? We consider the costs and benefits before we put on an event.

There is another way to look at costs. We can consider the downsides of doing something. I’ve shared with you some of the story about moving my mom from Charlotte, NC to Cupertino, CA. Earlier this year, my mom told me and my sisters that she wanted to live closer to one of us. We decided the best answer was for her to move near my sister in CA. In the middle of planning this move, my mom broke her leg and there were delays in getting occupancy of her new place. And, then, at the last minute, a hurricane was bearing down on the Carolinas. I am happy to report that my mom got out safely; she flew to California on Thursday and she is settled in her new home just ten minutes from my sister. But, when my mom told us she wanted to move, my sisters and I did consider the downsides of moving her at this stage of her life: making new friends, finding new doctors, having the ability to adapt and thrive.

In our daily lives, we consider the financial costs of doing something, and we consider
the downside costs of doing something. But, this morning, our Scripture is encouraging us to think about costs in another way. What is the cost of **not** doing something?

“The word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ‘Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.’ So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he 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.” In our Scripture from Jeremiah this morning, the Lord says: I will let you hear my words. I will continue to mold, reshape and rework the clay. God is telling us that God is inherently and intimately present in our lives, inspiring us in our decision making, in our desires and beliefs and motivations, always nudging us back to the path of light, so that we might bring to fruition the Kingdom of God, to make God’s goodness manifest. Remember the hymn (488): “Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart, … thou my best thought, by day or by night, waking or sleeping thy presence my light.” When we sing this hymn, we’re praying to **hear** that inspiration that God is offering us every day. We need to learn how to listen.

Listening is an art. One of my history professors in seminary talked about the hermeneutic of hospitality versus the hermeneutic of suspicion, hospitable interpretation versus suspicious interpretation. She was teaching us how to read primary books written by historical figures versus books written about historical figures. A primary source is ideal for accuracy, for getting to the truth and the nuance of what the historical figure thought or believed or experienced. But, the primary sources we were reading were written 500, 1,000, even 2,000 years ago. How do we read through cultural differences, perhaps even offensive statements, to hear the message being offered, to hear the truth that we can learn from others? We embrace a hermeneutic of hospitality versus a hermeneutic of suspicion. We open our hearts.

Just in case you are on the verge of an internal sigh and a tuning out because this appears
to be a fluffy sermon about the heart or a simplistic sermon about love, I ask that you resist that urge and listen. Opening our hearts is not fluff – it is the hard work of our faith. Our faith imbues in us the desire to understand, to not fear another point of view because we love the security of being resolute in our belief. Our faith imbues in us the desire to learn, to want to understand an issue from the various angles, so that we understand more fully and can respond in the best possible way. It is not easy. It is not easy to set aside our biases long enough to hear the other person’s perspective. We find ourselves making assumptions. This person talking to me, sharing his story is cold-hearted or narrow-minded, selfish or controlling, ignorant or overly sensitive. We all let bias get in the way. But, our faith calls us back. We need to learn to listen.

This past year, the House of Bishops found the courage to hear the truth of people’s experiences of sexual harassment, abuse, and sexual exploitation within our church. They invited reflections on the spiritual, psychological, and interpersonal experiences of abuse, which were shared at a liturgy during General Convention in July. Not easy to share. Not easy to listen. But, we listened in the hope of gaining the knowledge that will lead to healing and prevention. What is the cost of not listening? In the case of abuse, relentless harm and degradation.

To live in wholeness, to live in truth, to love fully, we need to listen. The costs of not listening are too great: degradation, lingering hurt, poor decision-making, missed opportunities. Our faith encourages us to break through our pride and seek the courage to listen. And, the wonder of it all is that God does more than offer us the inspiration. When we open our hearts and listen, God says, “Yes, that’s it!” and grants us peace. We know we’ve gotten it right, when we experience a certain peace, a tranquility in the bond of authentic community. Perhaps the cost of discipleship is having the courage to listen. Let us be community. Let us listen. Amen.