

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan

The Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 7, 2015

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you."

I want you to imagine what you would do in this scenario. You have been given a million dollars in the form of 10,000 one hundred dollar bills and given the instruction to keep this money safe. How would you keep it safe? Would you round up dozens of coffee cans, put the money in them and bury them in your backyard? Would you stuff it in your mattress and try to keep it safe while you sleep on it? Or would you take it to a bank where there is a vault, security system and an armed guard?

The apostle Paul speaks to us today about a similar situation. His instructions aren't about keeping a million dollars safe. No, his instructions are about keeping the treasure which God has given to us safe. What is the treasure God wants us to keep safe? Paul describes it this way, **"For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."** Paul tells us God has given us a treasure. This treasure is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. What makes this treasure so important? This treasure is important because it takes us out of the cool, damp and dreary darkness of sin and into the warm, soft and inviting warmth of the light of God's love.

Why use this comparison? Well, have you ever toured a cave? Last year, I was able to tour Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota. The tour took you down a path into a tunnel underground. It was neat to see, but there was something unsettling about it. It was cool. It was damp. You felt a little claustrophobic at times. It was a nice place to visit until the tour guide cut the lights. It was black and the darkness felt like it was pressing down on us. We were glad to have the lights turned back on.

Now, imagine you were in this cool, dark and damp cave, but you were stuck since the lights wouldn't come back on. How would you feel? Would you feel panic reaching up and grabbing a hold of you? Would you grow anxious and feel like a weight was crushing your chest because you don't like the dark? I would feel panic, anxiousness and fear because I would have no way to get out. Do you know what? This is the darkness we were in without the light of Jesus.

We were stuck in a black cave and had no way to get out of it. We would be doomed to live in eternal darkness. Yet, God in his love and his mercy has done a wonderful thing for us. He did not ask us to do the impossible and try to find our way out of the cave. He sent a rescue team to find us. **"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."**

God sent the rescue team of his son into this world to rescue us out of the dark cave of sin. Jesus brought the light of his love into the cave to find us. The light of his love pierced the darkness of the cave. It removes panic from our hearts because it brightly shines a way out for us. It drives away the damp cold of sin and replaces it with the warmth of love and forgiveness. It quiets our anxiety because Jesus lifts us out of the dark maze of sin and into fields flooded with the sunlight of his love.

The Holy Spirit has led Jesus' rescue effort into our hearts. He has called us out of the cold and dark cave of sin to stand in the warmth of Jesus' love. We have been given a way out because we have been given safety and security in the light of Jesus. We are no longer doomed to be stuck in the darkness of the

cave. We are able to walk, skip and jump in the sunshine of Jesus' love. Isn't it wonderful to be out of the panic inducing darkness of sin replaced and in the warmth and comfort of Jesus' light?

This light is the treasure Paul is speaking about that he wants us to keep safe. What kind of materials would you use to build to store this treasure? Would you use steel, concrete, brick or stone? I would want my treasure stored in a container made of any of these, but how does Paul describe the container? **"(God has made his) light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay."**

Paul says this wonderful treasure has been poured into us who are nothing more than clay jars. Clay? Really? Why on earth would God pour this light into clay jar like us? Clay isn't strong. It is weak. It is easy to chip and crack. Wouldn't he want to use a stronger material? Why not use concrete, brick, stone or steel? He gives us the reason when he says, **"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."**

It might seem like an innocent request to us to ask, "Would you please make me stronger than a jar of clay?" It might seem innocent, but it can be incredibly dangerous. Why? Aren't we really saying, "Lord, I don't trust you or think you can keep me safe. I don't think you are strong enough to stop me from falling away."? This is the dangerous heart of our request to be made of something other than clay. It makes our salvation dependent on us rather than Jesus. What does God in his love do for us?

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." He refuses to allow us to lean on our own power. He will preserve and protect us. He will not let us be overcome. He gives us rest because salvation comes from him. How do we know this is true? We can see it in the life of the Apostle Paul. **"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."**

Paul tells us about his own life. He faced many dangers, but he was never crushed or destroyed even though he was nothing more than a clay jar. God kept him safe and secure. God has promised to do the same thing for us. We will face many dangers in this life, but God won't allow us to be crushed either. We won't be smashed or destroyed. God will watch over us and keep us safe because the light of salvation has been poured into us.

We will be safe because God has preserved us, but we will still be jars of clay. We will still be fragile and in danger of breaking. We will be chipped by problems in this world. We will become cracked. Do you know what? It will be hard for us when this happens because we don't like to be chipped or cracked. We want to be built out of stronger material than clay because we think it will make us immune to hardship and struggle. What should we do when this happens?

We can remember why we are nothing more than jars of clay. **"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."** We are jars of clay because it highlights what Jesus has done for us. It reminds us the light of his love has been poured into our hearts. We can have rest because Jesus has pulled us out of the cave of sin into the wonderful light of his love. He will protect us and keep us safe.

If Jesus promises to keep us safe, why would he allow us to become cracked and broken? Well, what happens when you put a light under a cracked and chipped clay jar in a dark room? The light shines out of the clay jar and gives light to the dark room. Do you get why he might allow us to become cracked and broken? The light of the world has been poured into us and we have been given the responsibility to shine the light of salvation into the world.

When we become cracked and chipped it allows the light of our salvation to escape and shine out because the light fills the cracks. Think about how this truth impacts us in our day to day lives. Think about what it means when illness ravages your lungs or weakness reduces your ability to walk. Satan tries to use these things to break and shatter us. He might even be successful and cause a few cracks in us.

But, what would happen if instead of our clay jar shattering the cracks let the light of Jesus shine out? What if it led us to thank the people who helped us when we were having trouble walking instead of complaining about our inability to walk? What if we viewed an inability to breathe as an opportunity for others to show love to us and for us to show love back by expressing genuine appreciation for the love people show to us? Wouldn't this enrage Satan?

Think about what would happen if someone hurt us. What do we normally want to do? Get even, right? But what would happen if we forgave rather than getting even? The light of Christ would shine through the hole which was ripped in us. What if we are left all alone because our loved ones have died or abandoned us and it feels like our world is breaking to a million pieces? Wouldn't it be wonderful to remember our treasure hasn't abandoned us and his light is streaming out of the cracks in our clay jar?

How is God's treasure safe in us? **"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."** It is safe in a clay jar to show Christ's power and not ours. Doesn't this give us purpose and understanding for our lives? We are weak in order to show Christ's power. He will protect and take care of us. He won't let us be shattered. We get to rest in his wonderful protection because his strength protects clay jars like us. Amen.