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Treasure in Clay Jars
2 Corinthians 4:5-12

*For we do **not proclaim ourselves**; we **proclaim Jesus Christ** as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has **shone in our hearts to give the light** of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

*But we have this **treasure in clay jars**, so that it may be made clear that this **extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us**. ⁸ We are **afflicted** in every way, but not crushed; **perplexed**, but not driven to despair; ⁹ **persecuted**, but not forsaken; **struck down**, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always **carrying** in the body the death of Jesus, so that the **life of Jesus may also be made visible** in our bodies. ¹¹ For while we live, we are always being **given up to death** for Jesus' sake, so that the **life of Jesus may be made visible** in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but **life in you**.*

These are some **powerful words** that Paul is sharing.

I wonder, what did YOU hear in them?

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Did anyone hear HOPE?

What if these are words of hope?

Let me tell you why that would make sense!

Paul is speaking here to the church at Corinth.

It was a church full of different **factions**, who were constantly **fighting**, and trying to assert their **authority** over other groups.

It was NOT a calm, peaceful, happy place.

So Paul writes to them----**NOT to say** 'get it together, and follow me alone', but to tell the church that he is **relying upon the strength of God** in his own weakness, and imperfection!

That's where the image of *clay jar* comes in.
 Clay jars were imperfect, breakable, utilitarian, common vessels.
 That were *really only useful* for storage.

He's reminding believers that *they too have the power of God* within them.
 The *same treasure in clay jars*—
 a treasure in their broken, imperfect bodies
 as individuals, and as the body of Christ, the church.

Sound a little countercultural?
 Because this *isn't the way our world works*, is it?
 We see people trying to prove that they are right, better, and best---
 by *asserting their authority*, intellect, fame, fortune, or power!

We see *pride everywhere* in our world,
 And we see a very low tolerance any imperfection!
 Our world tears people apart for just being human!

And here, Paul is suggesting something truly countercultural:
 He is suggesting a *humble reliance on God's power*, not our own!
 Think about that!

Paul is also asking this of the *church* as a whole!
He is saying that even though the church is not perfect,
it still holds the ultimate treasure inside---the resurrection power of Jesus Christ!

Talk about HOPE for those early believers!
 And HOPE for us—today!

It reminds me of one of Jesus' powerful statements:
 In John 16:33 Jesus says:
In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world!

So, what does all this mean for us?
 It means, we are going to make it!
 We may get knocked down, but not out.
 We may suffer, but we still survive.
 We will have trouble, but trouble will not take over our lives!
 That's real hope!

And where do we get our strength? Only from Jesus Christ!

From the Good News of the Gospel!

Remember how during our Lenten season this year,

our theme was ***Mosaic—God uses all the pieces?***

And remember the most important thing about mosaic pieces?

It's that they are ***broken!***

They are imperfect!

Something—some force caused them to break.

But by the grace of the Creator,

Those broken pieces can make a beautiful mosaic—just like we did together,
and now it's in our Narthex!

This was more than just a community art project.

It is a ***symbol*** of who we are as the body of Christ together.

We are broken, imperfect.

And together, we are beautiful!

In fact, mosaics are a lot like the Japanese art form called Kintsugi.

In that form of art, pottery that has been cracked and broken is put back together,
Accentuating the cracks!

The broken places are put back together carefully, artfully,
with gold, or platinum!

So the art actually highlights the broken places!

Isn't that what God does in our lives?

Doesn't God's power shine in our lives, even more in our broken places?

Like when we suffer?

When we are down and out?

NOT that God causes suffering, but isn't God always with us IN IT?

And doesn't that bring power and beauty to our brokenness?

Rev. Mark Barger Elliott writes in *Feasting on the Word*,

that our faith in Jesus Christ does not mean freedom from adversity,

but "***rather that such adversity will grant us the opportunity***

to discover and come to trust that by God's grace,

light is always brighter than darkness, life stronger than death,

and what resides inside our broken, apprenticed bodies

is the glory of a resurrection waiting to burst forth". Mark Barger Elliott, *Feasting on the*

Word, Year B, vol 3, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), pg. 91

I was reading a sermon by Joanna Adams this week,
And she said something that I've never heard before,
She said,

“A saint is someone whose life has not been sufficiently researched”.

In other words, there are NO REAL SAINTS---
we are all sinners, in need of God's grace.
None of us is perfect, and we all fail one another.
Pretty much all the time.

Ever heard this funny morning prayer?

Dear Lord, So far today I've done alright.

I haven't gossiped, haven't lost my temper, haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or over-indulgent.

*But, in a few minutes, I'm going to get out of bed
and from then on, I'll be needing your help. Amen.*

Isn't that so true?

We ARE broken people!

And as a church? The same is true of us together, isn't it?

We often fail as a church!

There are people we don't greet, missions we don't support,
Programs we mess up.

Our bad attitudes can not only hurt one another, but they can pull us away from
God's greater mission in the world.

A perhaps better-known quote is:

The church is not a museum for saints,

It is a hospital for sinners.

We don't always like to claim that.

But it's true.

What does it mean for you and I?

Well, if we think we won't be hurt in a church, we're wrong.

We will be.

Maybe it already happened this morning!

Chances are you've been hurt. I know I have.

Because it's just us--- human beings—ordinary broken people.

I have to remind myself that if the church was for perfect people,

I could not belong here!

So we're constantly called to love—and forgiveness.

To think, *there but for the grace of God, go I.*

To hold everything lightly, and not take things so seriously.

To remember that smiles, snorts, and laughter can solve a lot of hurt! (at least that's what I'm counting on!)

We are called to hear truth, and leave behind the nonsense.

We are asked to look at everything, from God's perspective--

The eyes of love.

The eyes of grace.

Because there's a TREASURE IN HERE!

There's a gift---and it's the love—the love of God, and the love of neighbor—that's the real treasure, isn't it?

We all know that the *price of real love* is that we might get hurt, isn't it?

We all know that we hurt those we love, more than those we don't love, right?

Same is true in church.

There is so much love.

There is so much *good* that happens here.

So much ministry, and mission, miracles and testimonies that strengthen us!

And we sure can do more together than we could ever do alone.

So, we hold this treasure in clay jars, with eyes wide open.

Knowing that we are afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, but not destroyed.

And we are imperfect, broken, fragile human beings, like a clay jar.

We need God's grace and help---and we need the grace and help of one another.

That's the beauty of our Presbyterian tradition.

We believe in grace.

Not legalism, judgmentalism, or even the hatred that can happen in churches.

But rather, a recognition that we ALL need the grace of Jesus Christ.

Who are we to judge anyone else?

We are just as messed up as the neighbor we want to judge!

Remember Jesus saying something the speck in your neighbor's eye and ignoring the log in your own?

Thank God for grace!

Pastor William Self preached a sermon in 2003 called “*World Without Church*”, pondering what the world would be like without the church in it! He describes seeing a cathedral in Europe under restoration, covered in scaffolding, taken down to the bare bones to be rebuilt. And on that church was a sign that read: ***ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK.*** ***And he says, that sign should be outside every single church.***

Why?

Well, if you ask just any person, OUTSIDE the church— the reason is that the church is full of fake, selfish, hypocrites, who don’t care about anyone or anything except our own salvation.

But to the person who has experienced God’s power and presence in a church, There’s a different reason for that sign.

It’s all about what happening in here—

Something amazing that we cannot do alone.

We are risking our faith and our hearts—to love God and one another.

Can we get hurt? Of course we can!

But can we be also be LOVED? TOTALLY ACCEPTED? TRANSFORMED?

Oh yes!

The truth is, there is no Good News, no Gospel, no grace, Without the church.

The Bible is God’s letter to the church! To us!

In 1 Corinthians 12, he says, the church is the body of Christ on earth.

And we know that the church is made up of imperfect people,

Who are each a vital part of the greater body.

We are the hands and feet of Christ!

Church is not an ‘option’ for Christians, even though it might feel that way.

Church is ESSENTIAL for all who follow Jesus!

We NEED the community, the friendships,

We need to worship, pray, sing, and fellowship together!

This is how we experience the power and presence of God!

Church can be imperfect, frustrating, even crazy at times, But it’s also God’s gift to us.

It’s a place of hope.

It's our family of faith.
It's the body of Christ on earth!

Have you ever thought about what churches have done in history?

They have had unbelievable impact on social justice,
Democracy, civil rights, the formation of hospitals, schools, and colleges!
Most ivy league schools started as Christian institutions!
And much of the Bible? Yet another gift of and for the church!
Rev. Dr. William L. Self, *Day1.org*, December 14, 2003.

When we enter the church,

We enter at the risk of being *changed*.

We enter at the risk of being *truly loved and accepted*.

We enter at the risk of *being used by God* to change the world.

Is that risk worth it?

Only you can answer that!

Friends, we have this treasure in clay jars.

The light of Jesus Christ—the presence of God.

This power comes from God, not us.

We're broken and imperfect.

But inside, we hold love, grace and new life!

May we hold it, use it, and share it.

For this, all God's people can say together, Amen!