

The darkness of the world is so thick, so heavy and overbearing, it's easy to think that it doesn't matter what we do, nothing will ever change. Sometimes we feel like there's nothing left to hope for, that humanity has dug itself a hole so deep it will never see light again. As St. Paul explains, it's as though we are jars of clay easily broken and cast into the dustbin. Nonetheless, God glory is found in jars of clay. This morning we're going to talk about what this means and what it has to do with our walk with the Lord and one another.

## OPENING PRAYER

### 2<sup>nd</sup> CORINTHIANS 4:7-12

**But we have this treasure in jars of clay, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; <sup>8</sup> we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; <sup>10</sup> always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. <sup>11</sup> For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. <sup>12</sup> So death works in us, but life in you.**

One of my favorite Bible verses for reflection is the verse which precedes our reading this morning, **2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:6**. St. Paul wrote, **"For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."**

This verse reminds me that Jesus makes sense of this world, that he is my Lord, that he is my Savior, and that he will show me the way I can live my life in peace. These words set the stage for what Paul then says. He wrote, **"But we have this treasure in jars of clay" (v.7).**

Clay jars have many uses: Big jars can hold plants; they can be used to store grain and rice; and small ones can be used to hold nik naks, pens, and if you put a handle on one, you can use it as a coffee cup. Jars of clay have a host of uses. And

because they're literally made with earth, they're easy to make and they're cheap. There is literally no limit to the number of jars of clay one might create.

However, jars of clay are easily broken. Dropped or toppled they smash into a thousand pieces. I grew up in a divided, dysfunctional home. From a very early age my instinct was the preservation of my sense of wellbeing, to shelter myself, to insulate myself from the unknown, from the possibility of being broken by outside forces, uncontrollable, unmitigated forces which threatened my peace of mind and physical security.

I was a jar of clay, and I was broken many times. But the Lord revealed his glory in the face of Christ. Therein was my deliverance. It was in this revelation—the revelation of God's love, God's light, God's life in Christ—where I found my life.

The church in Corinth was a jar of clay too. Reading Paul's two letters to the people in that church reveals they were broken in many ways, by pride and greed, sexual cravings and drunkenness. Indeed, Paul saw how brittle the people were, that their relationships, that their homes and work, and that their relationship with God was like a house floating on sand. Thus he wrote, **“(We are) always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (v.10).**

Paul understood that we all die, and he knew from his own experience that we either die alone or we die in Jesus. He himself died in Christ when the Lord revealed to him his Gospel of mercy and grace, the love and light and the life manifested, first, on the Cross of Christ and, second, at the Lord's empty tomb.

Myself, when I realized that the life I longed for was what Jesus himself embodied, indeed, when I saw the face of Christ, I saw how every good thing, everything worth preserving, everything worth holding onto belonged to Jesus, that he was and he is the very embodiment of God's glory here on earth.

Paul wrote, **“For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (v.11).** Paul embraced his own mortality, and he gloried in that, for he himself knew that the only life worth living was the life of Jesus. Thus Paul died to his temptations and to his limitations, and the **“life of Jesus”** was manifested in him.

This is a good message for Lent, for the manifestation of the life of Jesus in us is the life of the crucified. Brothers and sisters, we are jars of clay—brittle, easily broken. But the Lord easily snaps us back together and then he uses us to fulfill his will.

Faith Lutheran Church understands jars of clay, for in our humiliation we found that we could do nothing; we couldn't power through our brokenness, as if a clay jar could sprout hands and piece itself back together again. But here is the Good News: The thing that makes a jar of clay valuable is not the jar itself. Rather, the thing that makes a jar of clay valuable is its contents.

God in his mercy has filled his jar of clay, Faith Lutheran Church, with all kinds of resources, and he's manifesting his glory all around us through the relationships we make, the acts of service we perform, and in the lives which he transforms among us. He is remolding a broken jar of clay once meant for menial use into a vase of immeasurable value to himself. This is what we seek, the outpouring of the life, the light, and the love of Christ among us.

Paul wrote, **“we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; <sup>9</sup>persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (vv.8-9)**. God is with us. We do not despair; we do not lose hope. For the lives we live, we live in Jesus, and he can never die again.

This week let us reflect on how God's **“power is made perfect in weakness” (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:9)**, that we are jars of clay into which God has poured his glory.

This week let us pray that despite our own frailty—our weaknesses and brittleness—the Lord would use us to bless our community.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.