

2nd S. after Pentecost 6/3/18
2 Corinthians 4:5-12 B

WE HAVE THIS TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY TO WHO THAT THE SURPASSING POWER BELONGS TO GOD AND NOT TO US.

We are in the time of seeding -- planting crops, flowers, gardens. We are planting seeds so that they may grow into a crop, to be harvested when the growing season is completed. However, between now and the time of harvest, these precious little seeds face many dangers. To grow, they must have the correct amounts of such things as sun, moisture, nutrients. But, God our Maker and Provider sees to it that those seeds grow.

The green paraments remind us that the season of Pentecost is the time of spiritual growth. God has planted the seed of faith in our heart in baptism. God wants that faith to grow, bloom, and blossom, producing a crop which glorifies Him and serves our neighbor. Living in Christ, strengthened by God's grace, we grow more like Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Yet, we face great danger. The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh would have us deny Christ.

Paul has good news for us in our Epistle lesson this morning. Paul assures us that there is reason to be glad. Striving to grow more like Christ amid such mighty and many enemies, we do not lose heart. We press on in faith. Paul writes: "We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (v. 7).

I. On this earth, as we feebly struggle, we are jars of clay.

A jar of clay is fragile, delicate, and feeble. Jars of clay are easily chipped and cracked. Jars of clay are easily broken. Drop a jar of clay and it shatters into a thousand pieces, never to be put back together again.

The point Paul is making is that a jar of clay is not eternal. It will wear out. Its usefulness comes to an end.

On this side of heaven, we are jars of clay. This is a result of the fall into sin. We lost the image of God in which we were created when our first parents fell into the death of sin. We were created to be eternal, just as our Creator. But, now we are subject to death and all other curses of sin.

I have told you before of my junior high principal, Mr. Juhala. He was looking forward to a long, enjoyable retirement after so many years of dedicated service. He retired at the end of my 8th-grade year and died of a heart attack before the summer was even over.

Have you known heartache? Have you ever been sick; is your body failing you? Maybe as a parent, you've heard those heart-breaking words from the doctor, "There's something wrong with your child". Has your spouse, who you vowed to love for better, for worse, ever frustrated you, disappointed you, angered you? Have you planted your crop, only to see hail or drought wipe it out? Maybe, you've seen flood waters fill your home.

Then, you understand what Paul means when he says we are "jars of clay". We are fragile, delicate jars of clay. Our lives on this earth are frail and temporary.

II. But, My Dear Friends in Christ, even though we are jars of clay, Jesus gives us reason to rejoice. We do not lose heart! Paul tells us the Good News of the Christian faith: "We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (v. 7).

"We have this treasure," Paul says. What is that treasure? That treasure is Jesus Christ, and the forgiveness, life and salvation we have in Him.

We are fragile jars of clay, subject to the wages of our sin, death, and all its vile curse upon our bodies, and minds, and souls. And we cannot save ourselves, or pull ourselves up by our bootstraps to make ourselves better. But God so loved us, and wanted to save us, and wanted us to live with Him that He gave His dearest treasure to save us. The very Son of God was born of Virgin Mother and took on all of our sin and all of its wages of death and all of its misery and all of our griefs and sorrows upon His own fragile body. He was stricken, smitten, and afflicted for us and our salvation as He was beaten, whipped, and finally crucified upon the altar of Calvary's cross. There, He died, was buried, and the 3rd day raised from the grave, bringing life and immortality to light.

III. Paul writes: "We are...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (v. 10).

Our Baptism has made us one with Jesus. We are united to Him in His death, His Easter resurrection, and His eternal life. As Christ Jesus lives, we live in Christ. His victory over sin, death, and the devil is our victory. In Christ Jesus, **WE HAVE HOPE**. Therefore, we do not lose heart. Heaven is our home. But for today, walking by faith, we have the treasure of everlasting life and the eternal bliss of heaven in jars of clay.

Look at again at the words of Paul, "We are...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (v. 10). We carry around in our bodies, these jars of clay, the death of Jesus. That means all of the sufferings, the hardships, the tribulations, the struggles, the calamities, and the evils of sin, we face in earthly life. St. Paul is reminding us that living a Christian life, walking by faith, means to be in constant, continual struggle against the devil, the world, and our flesh.

But, Paul comforts and cheers us, that the life of Jesus is manifested in our bodies. By "the life of Jesus" Paul means the victory Jesus has won for us with His holy precious blood, His innocent suffering and death.

We have this treasure of forgiveness, life, and salvation in jars of clay, so "we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed," because Christ lives in us, and we live in Christ, and Christ is with us (vv. 8-9). Through the hearing and learning of His Word and the eating of drinking of His True Body and Blood, Jesus continues to forgive us, strengthen us, and point our hearts to the joys of heaven to come. Truly, truly, we can say with the words of the Psalmist, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Ps 23:4).

Yes, My Dear Friends in Christ, we do face obstacles to growing more like Christ and pressing on towards the mansions of heaven. But, the Lord preserves the faithful. Therefore, we do not lose heart. We have the treasure of heaven and eternal life in jars of clay. As we feebly struggle, God gives us strength and patience to bear the cross, to fight the good fight for the faith, and take hold of the eternal life to which we were called in Jesus Christ. We do not lose heart, because God is with us now, today, and He has for us the crown of life in heaven.