

"The Treasure and the Pots"

It has been said that the Roman Empire ran on olive oil. Olive oil was used in ancient Rome for everything – cooking, bathing, keeping lamps lit, cosmetics. For decades, olive oil from southern Spain was shipped to Rome in large clay jugs called amphorae. These jugs were not worth the cost that would have been involved in sending them back to Spain and so were discarded, thrown away. The fragments of an estimated 25 million clay jars created a man-made hill that stands today on the bank of the Tiber River in Rome. The hill made from broken clay jugs is called Monte Testaccio. In the ancient world the value of those clay pots or jars was their contents. So also with Christ's followers and those who have been called to preach and teach. We and our churches are temporary, fragile and expendable. But God has given us the greatest treasure of all – the saving message of Jesus Christ our Savior. In a world that values outward beauty and measures success numerically, we would be wise to remember that God has entrusted to weak and mortal human beings the greatest treasure of all and the greatness of this treasure is contrasted all the more by the fact that we poor, weak sinners are the ones to whom it's been given! We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us!

Jesus doesn't pick crowded stadiums in which to reveal His glory. He does it, as Paul says, through the Word. "We do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord." God who said, "Let light shine," has made His light shine in our hearts! Jesus came to this earth to reveal God's glory to sinners. But notice how Jesus revealed his glory and what this glory was all about. His glory was the glory of a humble life of service. He lived a perfect life of humility which ended (or so it seemed) with a cruel death on a foreigner's cross. His was the glory of living and dying for the benefit of others – you and me included. His life ended with death because he gave himself totally to win our life. He made the great exchange – he took our sin upon himself and died the death of hell our sins deserved and gave us in place his holiness and righteousness. "We have seen his glory," John wrote, "the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Without his holiness and his righteousness coming to us as a gift, we're lost forever. There is no hope for any of us apart from him. We were in desperate need of his glory and of him revealing it to us so that we might see and live. On our own, we would never find or see his glory, either. Without Christ, we would be destined to live alone, forever. But the Lord changed the way life looks for each of you. He came here for you, he came here to reveal his glory to you. He brings you to see his glory as he reveals himself to us on the pages of Holy Scripture. We see God's glory in Christ and see his grace and truth revealed in the Word. Jesus has revealed his glory to you! See the signs of God's glory in your life! Jesus has revealed his glory for your eternal benefit. The great truth is that Jesus continues to reveal his glory to us each day. He didn't just come for one of your days or for an extraordinary day, but he came for each of your days, to give you what you need every day. He gives you his grace in rich supply: The God whose powerful Word put that shining ball of light in the sky that we call the sun is the same God who has done something just as fantastic and powerful for you – He has given you the light of salvation in Jesus Christ!

It takes eyes of faith to see Jesus' glory. The fact of the matter is that the apostle Paul and his companions didn't look glorious to the people of his day. And it's still that way today. It takes faith – faith which God alone can give – to see the glory of Jesus as revealed in the Word and in His messengers. See how Paul describes his ministry – "We have this treasure in jars of clay." "We are hard pressed...persecuted...struck down...we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus."

He doesn't come to us in a spectacular way with horns blowing and drums pounding, but he still comes to us in our common, everyday lives. Through His Word God calls us to see that his powerful presence still surrounds us today. Through His Word his voice of grace and love still speaks today. What seems to be ordinary is never ordinary when the Savior God himself is going with us. It's in your ordinary circumstances of life that he calls for your trust and asks you to wait on him to bless you in ways that you can't even imagine or see! It's through a rather "humble" instrument – the living Word – that God still carries out his great work today!

Haven't we all sold God and ourselves short in this matter? Not only do we not expect a miracle, we so often have a hard time believing that God is involved in the regular routine. And then, when the kind of trouble Paul describes here comes around, we not only have a hard time believing life is glorious but we have trouble seeing even a hint of sunshine. But that's why God allows these things to come into our lives – he reminds us how fragile we are – clay jars – and only when we see our weakness are we then able to see His strength, "so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." And Jesus and His glorious presence are always there – the Savior and his glorious presence are there for us in each of our days, in the middle of our troubles and He is there in the day-to-day reality of paying bills, raising children, making a living, continuing each day. Your lack of faith shows itself in your doubting that things will get better. How hard it is for each of us to admit – especially when trouble arises – that it's only the Lord who knows what's best for us and then simply trust him to do good!

The challenge for each of us is in believing we hold a great treasure in jars of clay. I heard about a minister in Texas who was asked to officiate at a prayer service for rain. This was during a summer which had been very dry and drought was strangling the land. The minister agreed to lead a service where the people prayed for rain. It came time for the service and everyone gathered together one evening. The minister stood up and looked over the crowd and said, "Let's all go home. There is no sense in praying today. No one brought an umbrella!"

In this jar of clay that is you – fragile and with plenty of imperfections – are you able to see the treasure that is yours? And how much do you really expect him to work in your daily life? See the signs of his glorious presence in your life! They're there in abundance! Let's open our eyes to the fact that the Lord is there with his grace for each of our days. He still comes to us through the Word! And what seems to be the ordinary and routine is an excellent opportunity to serve him! And also live, expecting his blessing! Faith is believing against all hope and trusting the power of the Word! It's easy to concentrate on the one problem you're facing and overlook the ten blessings God has given you. Christ does not want us to exist with a "woe is us – we're hopeless" attitude! Pray with the expectation that God is not only going to listen but he is answering in keeping with his will to save. Look with hope to the future knowing that Jesus has revealed his saving glory for you and will reveal it in even greater measure in time to come. Live each day with the wonderful expectation that the Lord will continue to reveal himself to you so that you come to know him even better and see Him more clearly! Finally, be open enough to see how God is challenging you to change your own attitudes toward life and how you see your own everyday routine in particular. A French writer once said: "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new lands, but in seeing with new eyes." May the Lord allow you to see with new eyes how Christ and His light surrounds you every day and may he give you the courage to take steps of faith for him which you have never taken before! We have this glorious treasure in jars of clay!