

2 Corinthians 4:5-12      2nd Sunday after Pentecost      June 5, 1994

*5For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. 6For 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. 7But 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.*

*8We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. 11For 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. 12So death is at work in us, but life in you.*

Fourteen years ago in June, my father died. My brother and sisters and I were left with a house, some land. We sat in the living room, where the Christmas tree stood each Christmas, where the Easter eggs had been hidden when we were small. We sat in the living room that was the day and night dwelling place for my mother in the months of her dying. In this room card tables had been set up for games of pinochle, in this room we had gathered around our first color TV to watch the flame burn the map at the beginning of Bonanza. In this room some of us had taken our first steps.

Shall we sell the house? We could not even think of parting with it.

Years passed. I moved back to Ohio. One day I walked through that house with my brother.

Now I saw only stains on the carpet, repairs needing to be made. There had been a great treasure here, but the house was not the treasure. Now it was but an empty shell or what St. Paul might call a clay jar.

In Paul's day valuables, jewelry, money might be hidden in jars of clay. What was visible to a casual glance no way revealed what was within.

Paul writes: *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. 7But 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.*

The treasure is the love of God in Jesus Christ. The jar of clay is my human body, your human body and all that is outward and visible in our lives. Like the living room in our house where I learned the love of my parents and brother and sisters, in our human life we experience

the love of God in Jesus Christ. But like that room our human life is a jar of clay, wearing, chipping, aging, while the treasure is still bright as light.

We might think of the Sabbath also as a jar of clay. The Sabbath, a day of rest, a day of worship is a gift of God to those God loves. A day of renewal, a day of remembering all that God had done, God's people through the years were refreshed by the Sabbath. But in time people began to confuse the jar of clay with the treasure. Instead of remembering that the Sabbath was for people, the Sabbath began to become a way of pleasing God.

So on the Sabbath day Jesus and his disciples were walking through the grain fields and the disciples plucked some grain for a snack, the self-appointed guardians of the rules, the Pharisees, objected. The Sabbath had become more important than the people the Sabbath was to serve. Jesus reminded them that God had created the Sabbath for the sake of people. He told them that he was Lord even of the Sabbath. Soon they would be plotting to kill him.

A clay jar, mistaken for the treasure, like an empty house being valued when the people are all gone.

Constantly in our life here together, we must distinguish between clay jars, and the true treasure. It is not easy.

As a Christian I have some unspoken expectations. I expect life to go smoothly with God on my side. I expect the troubles to be manageable, sickness and pain to be only for a reasonable amount of time, I expect that we will all get along with each other.

Slowly I forget which is the treasure, which the clay jar. I start to think that ease of living is the treasure, health, success. Life turns sour. Has God abandoned me?

Here is Paul's answer: *8We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.*

Outside there is nothing but trouble, but inside there is faith in God. 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.

In hospital rooms, on days when jobs are lost, as families gather for funerals, outwardly there is nothing but broken clay, a crucifixion. But where God has planted faith in your heart and mine, then the life of Jesus is in us, a true treasure.

The extraordinary power does belong to God and not to us. We gather here on the Lord's Day to be reminded of this, to come as beggars with nothing in our hands and to return to our seats filled with the very life of Jesus Christ in us. God does this all for our good.

I think my sisters and brother and I are ready to sell the house. Our treasure is there no longer, we know that now. Even as you and I are learning more day by day that our treasure is not what is seen, visible, but is the faith in Jesus Christ and the love of God that has been planted by God within us.