

2 Corinthians 4:5-12    2nd Sunday after Pentecost    June 1, 1997

*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.*

I remember a Sunday afternoon. Chuck Heindrichs took it upon himself to show Sue and me a little of Cleveland. With Loretta he drove us to the Cleveland Clinic. He pointed out the sights downtown. Then he took us where we could not otherwise go, up into the building where he works. Opening locked doors, using his authority to check us through security personnel, we traveled up to look out over the city. Every day he came to this place because he belonged. But Sue and I could only be there because we were with him.

I'm guessing you have all had an experience like that: Someone took you where you could not otherwise go: backstage, into an exclusive club, out into the plant where only workers are allowed. As long as you were with her, or him, no one barred your way.

"Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" The Pharisees, self-appointed security guardians of God's law, were questioning Jesus. His disciples had strayed out of bounds; as they walked through a grain field on the Sabbath, they picked the grain and ate it, a clear violation of God's command to rest on the seventh day.

Jesus answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions."

David, anointed by God, chosen by God took the bread from God's house and gave it to his companions.

Jesus, anointed by the Holy Spirit of God, chosen by God, gave his companions the right to pluck grain, on the Sabbath.

Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.

They were with Jesus, and Jesus is Lord over the Sabbath.

As long as I was with Chuck, the rules were suspended. But if I had returned to that building alone, having left Chuck, they would never have let me go past the lobby.

We walk in the presence of Jesus.

In his presence doors open to us that are otherwise closed.

With him we enter the area marked forgiveness. Though we have no right to be in forgiveness, Jesus has the key to open that door; every guard honors us for we are in Jesus' presence.

With him we enter a people called the Children of God. Only the Holy would have a right gather as Children of God, God's people Israel, the ones given the law, the keepers of God's law. But Jesus takes us where we have no right to be, into every place reserved only for the Children of God.

With Jesus we will be raised out of death into life. With him we will pass through all the bars and gates that would imprison us in death. With Jesus we will walk into everlasting life.

Knowing all of this, Paul's words make so much sense.

Speaking of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the light that has shone in the hearts of believers, Paul writes, "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."

In clay jars - picture an old piece of pottery, cracked, fragile, and inside jewels, money, jewelry, great wealth.

The treasure is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The love of God, the forgiveness of God, the power of God, the victory of God, In Jesus death and resurrection all of these are given to us, poured into our hearts.

The clay jar was Paul, and me, and you, and the Corinthians - all Christians - clay jars, not worthy of the treasure that has been placed in us by God yet chosen for just that treasure. Honored as the finest work of art is honored because of the treasure within, faith in Christ.

I look at you, right now, what will I see? Will I see all your chips and cracks, a bunch of miserable clay jars? Or will I see honored by being filled with the treasure that is Christ.

You look at me, what will you see? Weaknesses, and failings and ways I disappoint you? Or will you see the treasure I am appointed to proclaim, Christ?

I don't deserve to be here - neither do you. But I have been honored to accompany Christ where I do not belong, into the presence of God's Children.

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.

I think of all the people you can bring into the presence of God. In praying with them, for them, walking with you who walk with Jesus doors will open for them. They will be named Children of God, and welcomed into this family. You, who belong here, can bring them.

But always we need to remember why the doors open for us, and why prayers are answered, and why we are named the holy ones of God - because Jesus is walking with us.

The extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.