

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Second Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Psalms 81:1-10

II Corinthians 4:5-12

Mark 2:23-3:6

06/02/2024

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

23One sabbath [Jesus] was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" 25And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? 26He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, 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." 27Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; 28so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath." 3:1Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." 4Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. 5He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6The Pharisees

went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Treasure in Clay Jars

Good morning! Years ago in 1946 a shepherd was walking around an area of caves in an area of the West Bank. His cousin had noticed the caves before but this shepherd actually fell in one of them. That was when he noticed that the cave was filled with containers filled with scrolls. He didn't know it at the time, but Muhammed edh-Dhib had just found what might be the most significant archeological discovery of all time for both Jews and Christians. Over the next ten years major work was undertaken to uncover the rest of what we now call the Dead Sea Scrolls. All told, 15,000 scrolls have been discovered dating from the Third Century B.C.E to the First Century C.E. Scattered throughout those caves was a figurative gold mine. Much like our Second Reading they had discovered treasure in clay jars.

St. Paul the Apostle writes: *“5We 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.”¹

It is hard to believe that this beautiful text comes from a strained and damaged relationship. You see, Second Corinthians is most likely a collection of fragments from other letters that Paul has written to the community in Corinth. And clearly things had deteriorated. And in the midst of that heartache and pain we are shown a passage that is equally beautiful and powerful. From preachers to Bob Marley, the image of light in darkness has given hope to generations.

What I find so captivating about this passage is how vulnerable we find Paul. Here is a man that was considered an Apostle, he had seen the Risen Jesus Christ, he had spread the Gospel across most of the Mediterranean Sea, and yet, like any other human being he is hurt by damaging words from others. Paul had never shied from sharing a hard message. So when things were bad in Corinth, a large port city that scholars often call the Las Vegas of the Roman Empire, Paul sent one of his frequent letters, most likely First Corinthians, to the community to call for change. But he had gotten word that a new group of “Christians” had shown up in Corinth and had been working to discredit Paul. They called themselves superior apostles, and so Paul gives them the title “Super-Apostles” to criticize them.

Paul had always fought a battle with others questioning his authority to teach. From the very beginning of his ministry he faced this problem. The original disciples were skeptical of this Jewish zealot turned believer.

¹ II Corinthians 4:5-12 NRSV

And throughout his ministry he continued to face this problem. It seems that Paul was a much better writer than he was a speaker, and so he was often seen as weak. Regardless of his insecurity in front of people, it was his written word that bore the most power. And so he remained in constant contact with his communities as he traveled, working to spread the Gospel.

Now this text is beautiful and rich, and one single sermon can't do it justice. But what we can gather is that Paul is challenging us to see past the traditional assumptions. David E. Fredrickson, the New Testament professor at Luther Seminary, writes that "*this impossible thought hints that Paul does not write in terms of the binary opposition of life and death—an opposition repeating itself in soul/body, male/female, day/night, white/black, urban/rural ... and so on. Life and death coexist.*"²

We live in a world that pushes us to boil things down to one or the other. It makes things easier when they're white or black. But the hard reality is that most of life is grey. Heck, it's more than that, it's bursting with a rainbow of colors that forces us to realize that simple explanations rarely cut it.

In this piece of scripture we are shown a glimpse of a leader who chooses to use his vulnerability to illustrate the care and concern that he has for the community, not for selfish or individual gain, but in order to show forth God's work in Jesus Christ. We are shown that in fragile clay containers we hold a treasure more valuable than all the gold in the world. And while it might be tempting to divide our lives, the Good News of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection is that we hold both equally in our hearts and minds.

²<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-09-2/commentary-on-2-corinthians-45-12-2>

We are shown that God is not just a God of good or bad times, but the God of all. In our pain God is there, and in our joy God shows up too. In the mundane and the busy we find God present. What God needs from us is a willingness to share those experiences wholly with one another. It is our vulnerability that becomes a path for growth. I mean, look at the cross. Who would have thought that the brutal beating and murder of Jesus would lead a world to redemption? It was God's willingness to be vulnerable that led to eternal life. Maybe we could stand to be a little more vulnerable too. Amen.