

June 3, 2018

## **Cracked Pot Christians**

### Prayer

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Heavenly Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

You may be seated.

### Sermon

The text that was just read from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians where Paul says that those who bear the gospel are clay-pots. Broken clay or cracked clay pots. It's always held a special place in my heart. It's held a special place in my heart because 45 years ago this past Friday at the service where I was ordained to the ministry of Word and sacrament Bishop Royall Yount of the Florida Senate of the Lutheran Church in America used this text as the basis for the sermon.

And in that sermon, he had some poignant words for the six of us who were being ordained. He began by stating an obvious fact that we were human and that we would make mistakes throughout the course of our ministry. While that was true, it was a little bit of a downer for the six eager young men who were ready to embark on ministries to which they had been called. But he quickly followed those words up with some profound words of encouragement. Bishop Yount said remember you are not the treasure. The treasure is the Christ who dwells in your hearts. You are not the treasure. Christ is the treasure.

In 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, we hear Paul continuing to articulate his theology of ministry which he had begun back in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. And he makes it clear that those who bear the gospel are not perfect. They're imperfect human beings. They are flawed. They are cracked pots, but they bear

an incredible treasure. The treasure of God's love given in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are cracked pots bearing the light of Christ who dwells within us.

Now it's fascinating that Paul shares his theology of ministry with the church at Corinth. As we learned in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, the church at Corinth was a mess. It is arguably the most dysfunctional church in the history of Christianity. Paul tells us their factions in the church that were fighting for control. The church was planted with members who were quarrelsome and tenacious members who were spiritually arrogant and sexually promiscuous. They were so promiscuous in their sexuality, they had no sense of decency or propriety. And it's to that church Paul shares these words. We who bear the gospel are ordinary clay pots, easily broken, easily cracked bearing a great treasure. The treasure's not us. The treasure is Jesus Christ.

As Paul is sharing this theology of ministry with the church at Corinth. It's clear that he's talking not just about himself really and the apostles, but he's talking about all Christians. All Christians who are baptized are called to bear this gospel. And those who are called to bear the gospel are accountable to God for their actions. And so, we are called.

Now there's encouragement there because when we are baptized, we are brought into a relationship. We become a part of God's family with God as our Father and Christ as our brother. And that's encouraging imagery from Paul as he talks about those who bear the gospel being clay pots. But he goes on to say that those who bear the gospel, those who are baptized are given a commission. And that commission is to go and make disciples for Jesus. I want you to listen very carefully. That commission is given to all baptized Christians. It's given not just to pastors or priests or deacons. It's given to all who are baptized into

Christ, each and every one of us are called to bear witness to the Christ that dwells within us.

So, that being the case, how well are you doing living out your discipleship? Not just in terms of souls won for Christ. But in terms of bearing witness to the love of Christ that dwells within you. Are you always loving? Are you always gentle? Kind, generous, compassionate? How are you in bearing the treasure of Christ that dwells within the cracked pot of your life?

Well if you're not doing so well, neither am I. But don't worry about it because we are called not to be perfect but to be faithful. We're called to live out our discipleship within the brokenness of our lives. You know if you look through the pages of scripture, you will see throughout, that God uses flawed and imperfect people to accomplish his work in the world.

Noah was a drunk. Jacob was a conniver who deceived his blind and dying father to steal his brother's birthright. Moses was a basket case. When I said that at the early service and they chuckled I realized that that was a pun that I had not even thought about. (Laughter) But you look at Moses on Mount Sinai when God is calling him to send him back from Egypt. He's obviously got self-esteem issues. He's got all kinds of reasons why God could call somebody else that is better suited for it than him and he stutters. Samson was a womanizer. Rahab who helped the Israelites when they were scouting out the land that God had promised them was a prostitute. David was not only a womanizer, he was a murderer. And Peter was a coward. The Canite woman at the well, she was divorced many times over. So, we see throughout the pages of scripture that God uses not ordinary people, not those who are perfect but those who are faithful.

Daryl Strawberry, the former professional baseball player, who was really a star for the New York Mets, he and his wife Tracy are prime examples of God working through cracked pots to accomplish his purposes in the world. When Daryl was a player they had it all, but he got caught up in drugs and substance abuse. Other abusive behaviors, went through some divorces, wound up in jail.

He and his wife Tracy had it all. And because of the destructive behaviors which they exhibited in their lives. They lost it all. But God wasn't finished with them quite yet. They experienced redemption in healing through the gift of God's love in Jesus Christ. And it turned their lives around to the point that they began Daryl Strawberry ministries to work with people who suffered from addictions like them. And to let the light of Christ shine through the brokenness of their lives so that the healing they experienced might bring healing to the lives of those they touched. Daryl and Tracy Strawberry are broken clay pots. They're cracked pots. For the brokenness of their lives they share that treasure of Christ. And that treasure blesses not only them, it blesses the lives of those they touch.

There's a fable of the cracked jar or cracked pot from India that really illustrates how God can work through the flaws of our lives. There was a man who had a pole with two large water pots on either end that he would use to get water from a nearby stream and take it to his house. One of the pots was perfect and it was very proud of its perfection that it could always deliver a full load of water. But the other pot had a big crack in its side and it thought that it was an utter failure, it could only do half the job it was supposed to do. For two years it was just focused on its failure and was just completely despondent that it caused it's master so much extra work.

So, one day when the man went to the stream to draw water the cracked pot said to him you know I'm so sorry because of this crack in my side I make you work extra hard because I can only do half the work. The man said to him, I've known about your crack from the day I got you and have you ever noticed that on your side of the path as we go across there are beautiful flowers. I planted the seeds there so that you could water them every day. So now I can pick those flowers, those beautiful flowers to add beauty to my home.

God doesn't call us to be perfect. God simply calls us to be faithful. To bear witness to his love. To share his love with others. And if we need further encouragement we find that in the gospel that was read. Where Jesus has another fight with the Pharisees over their legalism. When they ask him why his disciples are plucking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus says something that completely contradicts everything they understand about faith and God. Jesus says to them, "Sabbath was made for human kind, not human kind for the Sabbath." And as he says that he is making a profound point that God is not so much interested in rules as God is interested in hearts. That's why God gives us forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

We don't have to be perfect. We don't have to worry about are we going to break this commandment or that. Not that we shouldn't try to live obediently to God. But when we do fall short we have forgiveness in Christ. And that brothers and sisters is the treasure we bear in the cracked pots of our lives. That's the treasure we bear even in our brokenness. You and I are called to be disciples and make disciples for Jesus. We're not perfect, we are simply cracked pot Christians who try to let the light of the treasure of the Christ that dwells within us shine through the brokenness of our lives.

May that peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.