

My first sermon at St. John’s was on 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians. And now it just so happens that my last sermon at St. John’s is on 2 Corinthians. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians is maybe my favorite book of the Bible. I like this book so much because one of Paul’s main points in the book is that it is OK that we are weak because Christ is our strength. Paul says in our passage, **“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (2 Cor 4:7)**. Today we will see that **God puts his treasure into our jars of clay**.

Have you ever gone through a particularly difficult time in your life? Maybe it has felt like one thing after another after another. Apparently Paul had just gone through a time like that when he wrote 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians. It was one thing after another after another. He had gone through some situation in which he didn’t think he was going to make it out alive. At the beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians he says, **“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death.” (2 Cor 1:8-9a)**. Paul went through some situation in which he thought that he was going to die. You might say that Paul thought he was as good as dead. But Paul goes on, **“But this happened so that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again” (2 Cor 1:9b-10a)**. Whatever the situation was that Paul was in, God delivered him and he escaped with his life.

But Paul had more troubles. In chapter 12 Paul says that a thorn in the flesh was given to him. We don’t know what that thorn was but we know that it was a source of deep pain for Paul because he pleaded with the Lord three times to take it away from him. But Jesus said to him, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9)**. And Paul ends that section by saying, **“When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10)**.

The metaphor that Paul uses in our passage for being weak is that he calls himself a jar of clay. One thing about a jar of clay is that it is pretty easily broken. If you accidentally drop the jar, it’s probably going to break, right? Do you ever feel like a jar of clay? Do you ever feel like you’re pretty easily broken?

Well, Paul says, **“We have this treasure in jars of clay” (2 Cor 4:7)**. God puts his treasure into our clay jars. I’d like to point out three aspects of the treasure that God has given us. Three aspects of this treasure are grace, power, and life. First, God has given us his grace. Paul says, **“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts” (2 Cor 4:6)**. We were in the darkness of sin and unbelief, but God made his light shine in our hearts. And who did he show to us when he caused his light to shine in our hearts? He showed us Jesus. Paul says, **“to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6)**. When you see the face of Christ, you see the face of your Savior. Through faith in Jesus all your sins are forgiven. **God made him who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)**.

That’s the message that Paul preached. He put the spotlight on Jesus. He says, **“For what we preach is not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For we have this treasure in jars of clay” (2 Corinthians 4:5)**. The jars-of-clay metaphor shows Paul’s weakness, but it also shows that he himself is not the treasure. It’s kind of like saying, “We have this amazing Christmas present in a cardboard box.” The cardboard box is not the present. The present is the present. No matter who preaches here, Jesus is the Savior. **“We preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake” (2 Cor 4:5)**. We are the cardboard box. Jesus is the Savior. And it strikes me that it is an undeserved privilege to even be the cardboard box. And it’s not just pastors. All Christians are privileged to share the

gospel. All Christians are privileged to be the jars of clay that carry this treasure. This is my last sermon here. It has been a privilege to share Jesus with you.

We are clay jars. But God puts his treasure into our clay jars. He gives us his grace. And he also gives us his power. Paul preached Jesus Christ as Lord. And that brought to Paul great persecution and trouble. In our passage he said, **“We are hard pressed on every side ... perplexed ... persecuted ... struck down...” (2 Cor 4:8-9)**. But notice that Paul always answers that with something positive. He says, **“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor 4:8-9)**. Where does Paul get the power to always get back up and to never give up? Of course the power comes from God. Paul says, **“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (2 Cor 4:7)**. Sometimes it might really bother us that we are weak. We might not want to admit that we are weak or we might try to avoid looking weak. But then you realize that when you admit to yourself that you’re weak, then you can stop trying to rely on your own power and start relying on God’s power.

God puts his treasure into our clay jars. Another aspect of the treasure God gives us is life. Notice that life is always what Paul ends with. **“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you” (2 Cor 4:10-12)**. Even though we are weak clay jars, we have life. We have spiritual life now. And we’ll have eternal life in heaven.

We are just clay jars. But God has put his treasure into our clay jars. He has given us his grace and his power and his life.

This is my final sermon that I will preach here. I would like to thank my wife. I really am a clay jar. And one of the ways God supports me is through you. I’d like to thank Pastor Lahmann. I’ve learned a lot about being a pastor from you. And I would like to thank all of you. You have been very kind to me. You have been very loving toward me and my family. Thank you. I’m just a clay jar, but God puts his treasure into our jars of clay. He gives us his grace, his power, and his life. Amen.