

Sermon September 10, 2023

2 Corinthians 4:7-12

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

Clay Pots

Several times each month, I try to spend the day with my father in Alexandria, VA. He just celebrated his 91st birthday. Every visit is a lovely gift... but he is no longer the man I remember. His voice has faded... his memory has faded... he often tells me the same stories over and over again. But, he has gained a new gentleness. And I know he values our visits as much as I do... even though he forgets I was there as soon as I walk out the door. I remember. And I hold those stories he told me of his childhood and his parents so I can tell my daughter and her children

We have had to adapt to a new reality.

The church has had to adapt to a new reality. Long before Covid, the structures of society started to shift and the place of the church changed. And many of you didn't like it. It's easy to put on rose colored glasses wishing we could re-create the glory days of our past. But the world has changed... we have changed... and we are literally standing on the crossroads, wondering what God has in store for us next.

Today we stand somewhere between the past and the future, birth and new life. Today, we stand ready to answer God's call to us, in whatever

form it may take. Today I tell you that God needs each and every one of us, no matter who we are or where we come from.

There is still so much work that needs to be done. God needs Trinity church today and tomorrow and for the years to come, as we continue to wait for the fulfillment of God's promises. The world needs people just like you and you and me. The world needs people like all of us... the People of God... to welcome people in and and rejoice whenever the circle of welcome grows.

That might sound strange. How can the world need us, you might ask, if they don't even know that we are here anymore? The church has lost some of its authority and position over the last several years. And yet, what better time can there be than right now to remind people of how strong God's love can be!

Throughout history, God has come to us when we need a glimpse of God's presence the most. Over and over, we learn once again that when God does anything in this world it is done through the people who gather together as God's own people.

It's a lesson we must keep learning, because we also learn that we are a forgetful people. We wander off... we think the church has nothing to say to us... we think that clergy are no longer relevant. We forget how powerful our God can be in the darkest times of our lives.

I believe that God calls people just like us to remind us that it is God who makes us relevant. It is God who makes us worthy of our calling. God's people may forget, but God is faithful through eternity. And God chooses people just like you and me to do remarkable things. Not because of anything we do to deserve it... it all comes from and ends with God.

God chose Prophets like Isaiah to come to the people when they forgot who God was and what God had done for them. They had drifted so far away from God that they literally lived in exile for generations. Children and grandchildren, born in a foreign land. The people forgot, but God never

did. Hope is not gone, Isaiah tells the people. Just as a shoot can grow out of an old stump, so shall new life be breathed into David's Kingdom. A peaceable kingdom shall emerge where natural born enemies will live together in harmony. Words of hope that sustained a people as they rebuilt their lives and rediscovered their God.

But the people forgot again. They drifted farther and farther away from God's creative vision. John came out of the wilderness and preached a message of change and a baptism of repentance. He prepared the way for Jesus, but the people turned their back on Jesus. They were silent as God's Anointed One was executed as a common criminal. Religious leaders joined with political leaders and lost sight of God's promises. And in the forefront...eager to stop the spread of this little messianic group that gathered in the name of Jesus, was a Pharisee named Saul. He even watched gleefully as the Apostle Stephen was stoned to death. But God saw something in this man that no one else could see. God chose him and named him. Blinded by the light on the road to Damascus, and the direction of Paul's life changed forever.

And yet, as dramatic as Paul's conversion was... as impressive as the spread of the Christian Faith has been... still, still the people forget.

We forget to trust in the One who created the sun and the stars, who breathed life into each of us, and who promises to come to us when we need it the most. We the people *forget*.

And so, God chose you members of Trinity Church. God choose you to come into broken places and bring hope and comfort. God chose you, not because you are a shining diamond... not because you are powerful or privileged. God chose you because, as Paul said in today's letter, you have a unique ability to uncover the treasure hidden in ordinary clay jars and shine a light of hope into them... reminding a forgetful people once again that our comfort... our hope... our lives are gift from God that show what God can do.

So, today, I ask that you take this gifted treasure seriously. All that is hidden in those ordinary pots bind us one to another through love.

In the clay pots you will find the waters of baptism that bind us to the promises of God. Water overflowing to refresh and renew us so that we are ready to face whatever lies ahead.

Because we are a forgetful people.

In the clay pots you will find bread and wine for the journey. In the breaking of the bread, we rediscover the story of who we are and who called us to this place. In the sharing of the cup, we suddenly find ourselves bound together as one people of God

Because we are a forgetful people.

In these clay pots, you will find something else. On those days when the responsibility of discipleship seems more than you can bear... when you feel unworthy and unprepared for the awesome work that God has called you to do. *Infused in those clay pots you will find the light of God.* None of us have what we need to live into our discipleship... everything we have comes to us from God But God will give you the strength you need on days when you are weary... God will give you the words that you need on days when you feel empty... God will give you a glimpse of the Holy when you need it most, so that you can put Jesus in the ears and mouths and eyes and hearts of the people you serve. Rejoicing in every moment of welcome.

Because we are a forgetful people.

And God sends ordinary people like you and like me, carrying only ordinary clay pots. To remind people of how extraordinary God really is.

That is our charge -- carrying the treasures hidden in your clay pots to the people, just as our ancestors carried the ark through the wilderness. With God on our side, we will put Jesus in the ears and mouths and eyes and hearts of God's people.

People of Trinity! That is our sacred charge! To put Jesus in the ears and mouths and eyes and hearts of everyone we meet, so that others might believe the good news and continue to share it with others. That they might experience the presence of God in a way that ensures that the people will REMEMBER.