

“Broken Jars of Clay”

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Last week, we saw the crowd gathered for Pentecost who were “cut to the heart” by Peter’s sermon when he said, “God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” When we are called to repent, we look inward at our broken hearts. No one wants a broken heart, except for God. In Ps. 51 we hear the words of David, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” We are faced with the truth: you are dust, you are ashes, you are a jar of clay which is easily broken. And, God receives you just that way and in no other way. It is a blessing to be broken. But as Paul says, we are not “crushed” or “driven to despair” or “forsaken” by God.

Continually confronted with the death of Jesus being the only way our sins could be paid for, we come before our Lord with a broken and contrite heart. A broken heart is helpless and humble and ready to receive what God gives.

Even though God binds up our broken heart and blesses it with forgiveness, grace, and salvation, tonight/this morning, we look at how we remain easily breakable. St. Paul says, “You are jars of clay.” Have you noticed how the descriptions and analogies offered in the Bible all evaluate our sinful condition in the same way? You are dust. You are jars of clay.

It is only when Christ becomes part of the equation that anything changes. Then you are the “treasure hidden in the field” or the “pearl of great price” which God will give anything to possess – not that you are anything more than dust or clay, but you are the object of His love. He pours value into you.

Paul tells us, “We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” He comes with a gracious gift. When you are feeling like a poor, miserable sinner (because you are); when you are feeling broken, worthless, terrified, do not settle for pop culture emotional medicine.

Feel-good messages like Barney the dinosaur telling us again and again, “Everyone is special” doesn’t actually bring any comfort or healing. When I’m feeling broken or useless, handing me a participation trophy doesn’t help. Pop culture emotional medicine doesn’t fix what is broken.

The world tells you, “Don’t worry. You are special. You are awesome. You are doing fine.” The Internet is filled with these kinds of fluff messages. When I am feeling worthless, miserable, broken, do not tell

me that I am doing fine. And do not tell me that I am awesome. I need to hear that I am loved by God and forgiven. I need to hear that God actually has a plan to fix my brokenness.

You come before your Lord in brokenness. I am not awesome. Jesus is awesome. He went to the cross and grave for you and me. Now, when you here that God is described as “awesome,” you have to think “Old School.” Do not think of it the way the word gets used today. God being awesome does not mean that He is really “cool” or “exciting” or simply “really powerful.” Any dictionary 100 years ago would tell you that to be “awesome” means to be totally terrifying and awe creating – to the point of overwhelming you.

I like to use the analogy of visiting the Grand Canyon. You look out over the amazing and wondrous nature of creation. You are not really in awe of it (in the Old School sense). Standing in the safety of the trail or designated lookout spot, the canyon is not “awesome” in the classic sense. You can be amazed and impressed by the vast power that must have been needed to carve this out – like the power of a worldwide flood. But technically, you are not in awe of the Grand Canyon – until you walk out, past the security fence, to the very edge and look down.

When you look at the reality that there would be serious consequences for taking one more step, what you are feeling at that moment is what makes that place Old School “awesome.”

We are jars of clay standing in the presence of the Potter. We are like the flask of ointment Mary breaks and pours on Jesus on the Friday before Palm Sunday – anointing His body, preparing Him for the cross and grave. Like with your heart, it is a blessing for the vessel, for the flask of oil to be broken and poured out. Jesus tells us that everything in this life is temporary “where moth and rust destroy.” Nothing in all of creation will last. “Heaven and earth will pass away. Only My Word will remain,” Jesus says.

The Word of God is the only part of creation that is eternal. Everything else will pass away in brokenness. The oil Mary pours out is expensive (about a year’s wages for an average worker.) That treasure is like the Word of God inside this breakable jar of clay. We have within us an unseen treasure of immense value – God’s Word of promise.

That Word of promise becomes a beautiful thing for you and me when it is connected to the crucified and risen Son of God. What Jesus did on the cross and from the grave fixes our brokenness.

It is like the lifelong cycle of dying and rising Luther speaks of in the catechism in regard to our baptismal life. Every day the Old Adam drowns and dies, and every day a new man emerges. We are broken and we are healed. You are a jar of clay. You are defined by the treasure that is within you. Amen.