

“Broken Vessel”

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

On Ash Wednesday, we began our Lenten journey looking 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.” On Ash Wednesday, we were faced with the truth: you are dust, you are ashes, you are broken. And, God receives you just that way and in no other way. It is a blessing to be broken. A broken heart has infinite value simply because it is helpless and humble and ready to receive what God gives.

Even though God binds up our broken heart and blesses it with forgiveness and grace, tonight, 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 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.

Barney the dinosaur tells us again and again, “Everyone is special.” As Dash, from the movie *The Incredibles* points out, “that is just another way of saying no one is.” 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. ” 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, like Mary in our Gospel reading. 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.

Think about 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 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 – 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. 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 endless 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. And that treasure is only a treasure because it is joined to Christ in His cross and grave. Amen.