

“When Life Gets Dark”
2 Corinthians 4:7-10
February 3, 2019
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

INTRODUCTION:

Most of what we know about the Church at Corinth comes from the letters Paul wrote to them.

**Over time,
those letters were copied and circulated to other churches.**

**Eventually, they were collected
and ultimately found their way into our Bibles.**

**Let’s take a look at one important part of the second letter
Paul sent to the church at Corinth.**

TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY:

In this portion of the letter – Chapter 4 – Paul is saying:

“. . . we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

**Paul is contrasting the relative insignificance
of the “bearer” of the Gospel
with the limitless value of the Gospel itself.**

Paul is saying: what I say is far more important than who I am.

**He is saying that he is a jar of clay
and the *message* he delivers is the treasure.**

Example:

**There is a television series called *Gold Rush* –
it is about gold mining in Alaska.**

**When the week's gold is weighed up,
it is often stored in a glass Mason jar.**

**Just a plain old canning jar
the one that holds pickles, tomatoes, etc.
one you can buy at most grocery and hardware stores.**

**The value of the contents of the jar
has nothing to do with the jar itself;
the real value is what the jar *contains*.**

**Paul is saying the Gospel that is *within* us – *each* of us –
has *eternal* value.**

**Our bodies do not reflect the value
of this treasure we have been given.**

**In other words, while the Gospel is perfect and beyond price,
we are like “jars of clay” – fragile, subject to destruction.**

**To fully illustrate what Paul is trying to say to the Corinthians,
and to us,**

**Paul uses militaristic language
to describe the situations we face in this world:**

- hard pressed, perplexed,**
- persecuted, struck down**

Hard pressed . . .

Ever feel cornered?

Like there is no way out of a bad situation?

You become stifled, it's hard to get away from it all?

**It seems like no matter what you may decide,
there just isn't a good solution.**

**We try one solution after another
and each time we fail
and soon we are almost to the point of giving up.**

That's what it means to be hard pressed.

**Paul says we may be hard pressed – but we are not crushed.
We may find ourselves in a situation that seems without hope.
However, God may not be finished with us yet.**

Someone once said: Don't put a period where God put a comma.

Perplexed . . .

One translation uses the word "bewildered" for "perplexed."

**Ever been in a situation that left you absolutely bewildered?
At your wits' end with no light at the end of the tunnel?
Totally at a loss?**

That's what it means to be perplexed.

**Again, the promises of the Gospel give us the hope we need
to keep from falling into a sea of despair.**

Persecuted . . .

**As Christians living in a democracy,
we are not as subject to the horrible persecutions**

that the early Christians faced.

**And we don't face the kind of persecutions
Christians face in countries that do not tolerate Christianity.**

**However, when I think of persecution,
I think of betrayal.**

**I think of the times I have had a friend
on whom I relied for companionship and advice,
who, for reasons I may never understand,
turned on me – betrayed me.**

You've had that happen to you, as well.

The feeling we are left with is one of being abandoned.

**Paul encourages us to remember that we are not abandoned.
We have Jesus with us;
the One who suffered temptation, persecution and death.
Jesus knows what we face and can comfort us.**

Struck down . . .

**The best illustration of being knocked down
but not destroyed is any one of the Rocky Balboa movies.**

**Just when it seems all is lost,
Rocky digs deep down inside of himself,
rises off the canvas,
and find the courage and fortitude
to carry on to victory.**

There is absolutely no way I could ever think of myself as Rocky!

But, in this old world, I have been knocked to my knees

**both spiritually and physically enough
that I know there comes a time
when I have to rise one more time
and let God be God.**

**For the last three weeks,
we've been looking at the attributes of God.
God is all-powerful, all-knowing and ever-present.**

**We do not – and can not –
face the trials and tribulations of this world
without God knowing about it
and without God being with us in it.**

**That's why Paul can say:
⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed;
perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not
abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.**

OUTSIDE OBSERVATIONS:

**Here is one reason Paul included this in his letter to the Corinthians
and an excellent reason we should heed what he said.**

**Paul said:
¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so
that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.**

We are watched more closely by others than we realize.

**Someone once said
we may be the only Bible a non-believer ever reads.**

**People – believers and non-believers – watch us
to see how we handle adversity.
Do we *live* what we *believe*?**

Does our faith have substance beyond words?

The One we call Lord – Jesus – suffered terribly.

**He was slandered as a wicked person,
he was branded a deceiver, a rebel,
one who preached sedition.**

And He suffered for it.

But He never once lost His faith.

Paul is saying to the Corinthians,

**that we all may face the same sort of trials and tribulations
and we must look to Jesus
as the example of how we are to react.**

Part of the liturgy we shall say later in this service

as we celebrate the Lord's Supper is:

**Through the Holy Spirit, who lives both in Christ and in us,
we are united more and more to Christ's blessed body. And so,
although Christ is in heaven and we are on earth, we are flesh
of his flesh and bone of his bone. And we forever live on and
are governed by one Spirit, as the members of our body are by
one soul.**

Since Jesus suffered the same trials and tribulations we all face,

He understands and is in full sympathy with us.

There are those in our lives who have suffered much –

- some even in this congregation –

- yet somehow manage to retain their faith.

Those folks who can rise above their suffering

and continue to trust that God has their back.

We look to them as examples.

We borrow from their faith to strengthen our own.

**With time and practice,
we may become an example to someone else who is hurting;
someone who is “hard pressed on every side,
perplexed, persecuted, struck down.”**

**That is the time when we truly become “jars of clay”
that hold – and offer – the “treasure” we have within us.
A rock-solid faith.**

**As we are blessed,
may we become a blessing to others.**

Prayer:

**All-knowing and all-powerful God, You know the contents of
our hearts and the situations we face. Like the old spiritual says:
“Don’t make the mountain any lower; give me the strength to climb
it.” Enter our lives, increase our faith, and help us face – and
overcome – the problems we face. In Jesus’ name, AMEN.**