Sermon, June 2, 2024
"We Hold a Treasure"
Second Sunday after Pentecost,
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Wilton, Maine

When the jars of clay remember they are jars of clay, the treasure within gets all the glory, which seems somehow more fitting." — Jen Hatmaker

The Navy only teaches you two things: "Don't throw the slops out to windward", and "Never volunteer for anything".

I've had so much plastic surgery, when I die they will donate my body to Tupperware.
Joan Rivers

Got the theme of the sermon yet? No? Good that way you will hopefully keep listening. So let's go to a commercial.

The scene: A working waterfront on a gray, misty morning. Why it could be the coast of Maine!

Announcer: "Keeping your oysters growing while keeping your business growing has you swamped. You need to hire."

Fisherman: I need Indeed Announcer: **Indeed you do.**

But what kind of job ad would we get from today's epistle to be a follower of Jesus: you are to be afflicted in every way, perplexed, persecuted struck down and carrying in your body the death of Jesus. How well would that ad do on Indeed? Does it help that Paul qualifies all these outcomes of your position? Well you won't be crushed or driven to despair or forsaken or destroyed. Would that make you more likely to apply? "How was your day at work today, honey?" Oh just fine I didn't get crushed or driven to despair – just another day at the office.

And would you ever volunteer for such a position? No way. But it is important to remember that no one applies for a position to be a disciple, to be a follower of Jesus, we are called – we don't apply or volunteer. And a beautiful example of a call story is that of the young boy Samuel in the first lesson. It takes three calls by the Lord for Samuel to recognize something special is happening and when he can't interpret it himself, he needs the priest Eli to help him understand.

So question one for us this morning is, "have each one of us been called?" Do you remember the time and the place or was it more gradual, an increasing realization over time? Are you still open to God's continual call? Or is your ringer off or are you on airplane mode?

And the question after the call is always, "What's next?" That often can take awhile. After Paul's dramatic conversion it took him ten to fifteen years before he started traveling around the Mediterranean on his missionary journeys and writing his letters. For the next several weeks, the epistle readings are from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians where he responds to conflicts between himself and the community at Corinth. In the opening verse of today's passage, Paul argues that he is not promoting himself in his preaching, but Jesus Christ as Lord. Through the lives we live and the words we speak, the light of God's glory shines in the darkness. But we face limitations as carriers of Christ's spirit—the frailty of our human existence is like that of a clay jar. Clay jars were plentiful in Palestine at the time of Jesus because there clay or mud was plentiful and local potters were in demand who could transform this clay into something useful. These jars or vessels were used to hold dry goods such as flour and seed, as well as liquids such as oil and wine. But they weren't always practical. It didn't take much to smash one. I mean wouldn't Tupperware have been much more practical?

So let's talk Tupperware for a minute here. What are the items you are most fond of displaying in your home? Aside from photos of the kids and grandkids, it might be some works of art, a painting, some small sculpture, maybe something you made yourself or was made by someone for you. I have yet to go to anyone's home where their Tupperware collection was prominently featured. They're usually tucked away in the Lazy Susan. They're practical and sturdy but are mostly valuable as a container for what's inside of them – maybe that leftover piece of delicious lasagna you didn't have any more room for at dinner.

So why put treasure in an earthen pot, a breakable vessel that offers no protection for the treasure except from dust and water, and divine treasure at that? To show that the treasure has nothing to do with the pot, "to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us".

Paul knew that what mattered was not the earthen vessel, but what it contained. In our first verse this morning he says, "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus

Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." The kingdom of God moves forward through weak, weary, easily broken earthen vessels.

And why these kind of vessels? Why not beautiful shiny ones, maybe like those on the bulletin cover? Too enamored of themselves, too much pride, a little narcissistic perhaps. And what keeps us from realizing this treasure we carry? Because our jars are too full already. There may not be a lot of room for "the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ". What are our jars too full of? Worries and fears of the future or regrets of the past. Information, too much information that we are bombarded with constantly today to where our jars are overflowing. Resentments and bitterness that we can't get rid of.

Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.
Mark Twain

Could our summer assignment be to not read a book a week but to let our hearts and minds rest? To try to empty our vessels?

The empty vessel makes the loudest sound.
William Shakespeare

A vessel is formed from a lump of clay with care, however, it is the empty space within the vessel that makes it useful.
Laozi

The summer assignment should you be willing to accept it? Keep your ringer on and your discernment abilities active – to what or whom is God calling you this summer? Remember that we are all jars of clay, each useful in its own way, each beautiful but we ding easily so be gentle and kind to each other.

Keep the inside of your jar as empty as possible, be open to each new day, and never forget that it is the glory of God that fills our jars.

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