

June 3, 2018

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

<sup>5</sup>You see, we don't go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup>For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup>We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. <sup>8</sup>We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. <sup>9</sup>We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. <sup>10</sup>Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. <sup>11</sup>Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies. <sup>12</sup>So we live in the face of death, but this has resulted in eternal life for you.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sometimes, I just find it helpful to read a Bible passage again and again until it finally starts to settle in. Perhaps, its like listening to a song over and over again or watching a movie a second time to see those things we may have initially missed. I did that this week with our text from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians. Not only rereading it in the translation it was just read (NRSV) but also in multiple English translations. One such translation that helped me a bit was the New Living Translation (NLT). I want to read that to you (see above) and as I do I ask you to listen for one thing that catches your attention. What word, phrase, or image resonates with you this morning and seems applicable to your life? (Read text)

Now, I want you to turn to a neighbor and share in under a minute what this word, phrase, or image was and why it caught your attention. That's it. I have been in your shoes before and know and have given into the temptation to talk about something easier (i.e., the weather, the game last night, or what I am doing after

church), but I encourage you to not do that. In order to proclaim our faith to the world, we must learn to speak our faith and what better way to do than in the safety and security of those whom we know. And if you don't know your neighbor, then all the better.

It sounds like you had some lively conversations. Does anyone wish to share simply their word, phrase, or image that came to mind? You can shout it out and don't need to tell us why that caught your attention. (Brief pause to see if anyone does this) I thank you for trying this and who knows – we just might try this again from time to time.

What really stood out to me was the image of fragile clay jars. It reminded me of something that happened to me this past week. Amanda and I had been to the grocery store and upon returning home were unloading these food items that would nourish and sustain our bodies. One of the last items was a gallon of milk. I grabbed it in one hand and then went to shut the lift gate on the car with the other hand when the gallon of milk slipped out of my grasp and onto the ground. I suppose glass containers gave way to plastic containers many years ago because they were cheaper to make. Yet, I also fathom to guess they may have been deemed more durable given plastics ability to flex and not break when placed in a bag with another glass container. Yet, as I discovered, they are still very fragile when dropped just a few feet onto concrete as my gallon of milk broke open and the contents poured out onto the ground.

In many ways, our earthly bodies are like that gallon of milk. While science, pharmaceutical companies, and the medical field have done remarkable things in sustaining life, finding cures to various ailments, and ways to prevent other illnesses of attacking our bodies the bottom line is that our earthen vessels that are our human bodies remain extremely fragile. We all have encountered that in one way or another

when we get sick and lie in bed with little strength and energy to get out and put 2 feet on the ground. Or when the light of one's life is extinguished in an instant due to some accident or unforeseen medical emergency. Or when our bodies simply age leaving our bones more brittle, skin wrinkled, eyesight and hearing diminished, and the inability to do the things they once could. Indeed, our bodies are like that gallon of milk or clay jars that seem strong and sturdy but when dropped can shatter into hundreds of small pieces.

Yet, despite that God can do amazing things in and through these fragile bodies. Have you seen that video showing a man, some refer to as a real life "Spider Man", scaling a tall building and rescuing a 4-year old boy hanging off the side of a 5<sup>th</sup> floor balcony? Somehow, he had wandered out there, climbed up small wall a few feet high guarding the perimeter of the balcony and fell over the edge but not before clinging to that wall and holding on for dear life. A 22-year-old migrant from Libya, Mamoudou Gassama dressed in tattered blue jeans and white shirts sprung into action and literally began scaling the wall from the ground up as he grabs onto the ledge of one balcony railing, climbed up and then leaped to grab the next one a floor above until he finally made it to the fifth floor and pulled the young boy to safety. Afterward, Gassama told reporters, "I ran. I ran across the street to save him. When I started to climb, it gave me courage to keep climbing. God helped me too."<sup>i</sup>

God can do amazing things through our fragile bodies. Even in those who are different than us. Those whom many despise and wish to dehumanize. A migrant fleeing for his life as Gassama while in Libya he was arrested and beaten. Amid much debate over immigration laws and no matter which side we stand on our life in Christ calls us to view, testify to, and lift-up the fact God is at work even in those who speak another language, have a different skin color, or enter a nation illegally. Despite our differences

in the area of immigration laws we, as Christians, we are called in Christ to seek the sanctity of all lives. Because the light of Christ shines forth even in those the world may say otherwise.

And this passage also spoke to me in our life as a congregation. We are indeed at times very fragile. Differences, such as on various aspects of politics, may separate us and create tension. Numbers in attendance may decline or weekly giving at times trend downward. We may be tired and lose hope as current members have not entered our doors in quite some time or unfamiliar faces are at times far and few in between. We mustn't give into the snare of the enemy in times such as these. Rather, we turn to God and these poetic words found in our epistle lesson from the Apostle Paul, "We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies." Our congregation may not be what it was 10, 20, or 30 years ago but we can't ever give up. While fragile in many ways God is at work in our fragility. God created light out of darkness and that very light shines in even the remotest areas of darkness in the church. We push on for the sake of Jesus Christ. So, the world who doesn't know of his great love may know of that love through the glory of God that radiates forth through our mortal bodies. People of God, no matter your age, abilities, limitations, strengths, weaknesses, etc. the light of Christ shines in you and it shines in us together as one in Christ. God's glory is at work in our clay jars. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.pressherald.com/2018/05/28/president-of-france-meets-with-spiderman-hero/>