

SERMON: Treasure in Clay Jars

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Do you remember as a child being excited by the idea of buried treasure? Exploring in the woods or digging in the sand on the beach, hearing stories of pirates following a map where X marked the spot of a buried trunk full of gold and jewels. Even as adults many people still seek adventure in searching for lost treasure – sometimes with a metal detector – and more recently with a smartphone and GPS.

Have you ever heard of *geocaching*? (I'll spell it for you.) Billed as the world's largest treasure hunt, it started in early 2000 as a hobby for people who love to explore and travel and hike by roads less traveled (you might say). According to the official website, "geocaching is a real-world, outdoor adventure that is happening all the time, all around the world. To play, participants use the Geocaching app and/or a GPS device to navigate to cleverly hidden containers called geocaches. There are millions of geocaches in 190 countries waiting to be discovered.... Geocaches come in all different shapes, sizes, and difficulties and are hidden in both rural and urban settings. Once you find a geocache, you open it up and sign the logbook. You may discover some trade or swag items (small toys, keychains, trinkets) inside the geocache. The general

rule of thumb is if you take something, you should leave something of equal or greater value. Then you place the container back exactly how you found it and share your experience online with the rest of the geocaching community.”

www.geocaching.com

So, the focus of this treasure hunt is not the treasure itself; but the hunt is where the riches abound.

In his second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote about TREASURE IN CLAY JARS.

“For we do not proclaim ourselves,” Paul wrote, “we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’s sake. For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this *treasure in clay jars*, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.”

First of all, it’s important that we all understand that WE – the followers of Christ – are the clay jars. We are plain, fragile, vulnerable, utilitarian, and of no

good purpose except to contain and proclaim something much greater. “We do not proclaim ourselves, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’s sake.”

You may have heard recently the news story about a Louisiana televangelist named Jesse Duplantis. He is “asking his followers to donate \$54 million so he can buy a private jet to help him preach the gospel ‘to the world.’ His ministry has already paid for three other [private jets]” but those have lost their luster. “He feels that the multiple stops required to have them refueled is interfering with his campaign to evangelize the world.” (Zoe Papadakis, *Jesse Duplantis Jet: TV Preacher Asks Flock for \$54M for Private Plane*, www.newsmax.com, Wednesday, 30 May 2018)

In a video posted on his ministry’s website, this charlatan said, “I really believe that if the Lord Jesus Christ was physically on the Earth today, he wouldn’t be riding a donkey.... He’d be in an airplane flying all over the world.”

Now, if this seems outrageous and unheard of, you need to know that he’s not the only one who’s doing this. Other televangelists and celebrity pastors are claiming this luxury as a necessity for their ministry. One claimed that commercial airline travel was “agitating his spirit.” People were coming up to him and asking

him to pray for them (heaven forbid!). “You can’t manage that today,” he said. “This dope-filled world, and [you] get in a long tube with a bunch of demons. And it’s deadly.” (Zoe Papadakis, *Jesse Duplantis Jet: TV Preacher Asks Flock for \$54M for Private Plane*, www.newsmax.com, Wednesday, 30 May 2018)

I’m going to try as hard as I can not to be sarcastic when I say that this sounds like an excellent sequel to the movie, *Snakes on a Plane*. I think these preachers have strayed from the paths of righteousness. They are not even trying to be clever about it; not even trying to disguise their unabashed greed and self-aggrandizement. I think they need to sit down with their Bibles and re-read a few passages. If they can presume the form of transportation Jesus would choose in this modern world, I think I can also presume that the apostle Paul would write exactly the same words today: “We do not proclaim ourselves.”

In fact, Paul went on to emphasize this further. “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.”

While it's easy for me to shame the televangelists asking for private jets, I should admit that I have been known to look for a little reward now and then. Some of the struggles in my own life have had me wondering why God doesn't cut me a break. But then I remember that God didn't even cut his own son a break. And I am nothing but a vessel for the treasure that is Christ. I carry in my body "the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible" in me.

We've all heard the adage, *what doesn't kill you makes you stronger*, and every one of us probably has some personal experience that reveals its truth. One theologian explained, "...Our faith in Jesus Christ does not mean we will never experience adversity, but rather that such adversity will grant us the opportunity to discover and come to trust that by God's grace light is always brighter than the darkness, life stronger than death, and what resides inside our broken, apprenticed bodies is the glory of a resurrection waiting to burst forth." (Mark Barger Elliott, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol. 3, Bartlett and Brown Taylor, ed.)

The treasure is Christ, the good news of the gospel, the glory of resurrection. Going back to Paul's words: "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The extraordinary power of God." We have this TREASURE IN CLAY JARS.

And this – the greatest of all treasures – ought not to be hidden, but out in the open for everyone to see. Clay pots that we are, we need to be transparent to make the life of Christ visible in us.

Furthermore, let me suggest that this treasure is worth searching for in every corner of God’s creation and in every creature made in God’s image. Granted, some places and some people may look and feel and act as though they are God-forsaken, as though they hold nothing worthy of redemption. But Psalm 139 asserts that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made... intricately woven in the depths of the earth.” We need to be reminded of this truth about ourselves and about others. And then we need to live and proclaim, not ourselves, but the treasure that is in us.

That treasure can be renewed and rediscovered as we partake in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper today. As we partake of Christ’s body and blood, sacrificed for us, he becomes a part of us and we become a part of him. Once again, we receive the treasure – the extraordinary power of God, the glory of resurrection.

It is not meant to be hidden, but to be found. As we discover it in ourselves, may we reveal it to others, and may we seek it in others... for Jesus' sake, and to the glory of God!

AMEN.