

## Jars of Clay

2018-06-02 – Year B – Pentecost 5-29 – The Rev. Christopher Klukas

Deuteronomy 5:6–21; Psalm 81:1–11 (12); 2 Corinthians 4:1–12; Mark 2:23–28

- Today we heard the 10 Commandments as our Old Testament lesson. This is one of the pinnacle moments in Moses' prophetic ministry. Picture Charlton Heston coming down the mountain with the tablets of stone.
- Last week we heard the story of the burning bush, just after the portion we read, God calls Moses to return to Egypt to tell Pharaoh to let God's people go free.
- How does Moses respond? He says "no"! Exodus 4:10-13.
- Have you ever felt like that? Has God ever called you to something which you feel totally unqualified and unskilled to do?

### Jars of Clay

- It is actually a good thing when you feel inadequate, because it reminds you whose power you need to rely on.
- 2 Corinthians 4:7 "we have this treasure in jars of clay..."
  - Clay pots were inexpensive, inconsequential vessels in the ancient world. If you wanted something fancy, you would usually choose either metal or glass.
  - The treasure to which Paul refers is the Gospel, we can see this in the previous verse, 4:6.
- So what are the jars of clay? We are!
  - One of the rules of etiquette at a wedding is that you never want to upstage the bride.
  - God is not worried about being upstaged by us, but he is concerned that his Gospel be clearly presented to those who are perishing.
  - We never want to make the proclamation of the Gospel about ourselves, because we want to focus to be where it properly belongs.
  - 2 Cor 4:5 "What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord..."

### Peddlers of God's Word

- One of the main purposes of this second letter to the Corinthians was for Paul to defend his apostleship against the accusations of his critics.
- 2 Cor 2:17 "We are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word."
  - Sometimes there is an urge to make the Gospel flashy or relevant to gain followers. Selling the benefits of the Gospel without counting the cost. Or making extra promises like a guarantee of health and wealth.
  - 2 Cor 4:2 "We refuse to...tamper with God's word." The word "tamper" was the word used of wine merchants when they "tampered" with their product by water down the wine. We can water down the Gospel when we discount sin and gloss over the offense and challenge of the Gospel.

- We aren't trying to "close a sale" by pushing people to make a decision about Jesus and pray the sinners prayer. Instead, we are patient waiting as long as it takes for them to be ready.
- There may also have been a criticism that Paul couldn't be a true Apostle because of all of the suffering he has endured. To this he responds with vv. 8-9.
- Our job is not to preach ourselves, or to make the word of God palatable. Our job is to proclaim the Gospel by the "open statement of the truth" (2 Cor 4:2).

### **Blinded to the Truth**

- The world certainly doesn't need any more lies. What it needs is truth as an antidote to the lies.
- Paul says that some won't be able to see the truth of the Gospel because it will be veiled to them (2 Cor 4:3-4).
- The blinding is by the God of this world, Satan, the father of lies.
- When you lie to someone long enough and consistently enough, they begin to believe the lies and get blinded to the truth.
  - Cult membership does this. Through isolation and brainwashing, cult leaders reinforce their lies and blind converts to the truth.
- There are plenty of people in this world who are blinded to the fact that the sin in their lives is sin. And if they believe there is a God at all, they seem him as a condemning God, one who couldn't possibly love them. This couldn't be further from the truth.
- In the previous chapter, Paul speaks of this same veil and says that it is only Christ who can take it away (3:14).
- God delights to use us in this process, giving us opportunities to share the hope that we have found in him and the truth of the scriptures.
- As we share hope and truth, God lifts the veil and changes hearts.

### **So What?**

- So what does this all mean for us?
- It means that we need to preach the truth accurately and boldly when we have the opportunity. And we need to pray for those opportunities.
  - We all need to shift our thinking and embrace God's call to be missionaries.
- It means that we don't need to worry about our worthiness, or our eloquence, and we certainly don't have to have it all together to be able to preach the Gospel.
  - Why? Because we know that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16), and that it is only Christ who can lift the veil and heal the spiritual blindness of people's eyes.
- It means that God can use even you, even me, even us. In fact he loves to do so. When he does, he gets all of the Glory, because when he works through us, it is clear that the power comes from him and not from us.