

Sermon Title: **“Treasure in Clay Jars”**

Bible: **2 Corinthians 4:5-12 & Mark 2:23-3:6**

When: on the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost, June 2, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube Live Streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. When Was Your Last Time to Eat Out?

When was your last time to eat out? Where did you go? Who was there with you? What did you order? Was it delicious? Do you want to recommend it to your friends? Was the service good? These can be several questions about your experience at the restaurant. But have you been asked about what kind of plates were used? Did you even remember what kind of plate was used for your food? Sometimes, we can remember the plate, if it is a special one.

Sometimes, it is very important how the food is displayed on the plate or in a dish. But usually, the plate is not on display for its beauty, but to hold the food. We need both the food and the dish. We cannot serve the food without our dish. But the dish is there for the food!

2. Treasure in Clay Jars

Today's first scripture reading is from the 2nd Corinthians. This is the letter from the Apostle Paul and Timothy to the church in Corinth. One of the reasons why they wrote this letter was that there was a big challenge against their leadership. If we look at chapter 11, Paul mentioned the presence of “super-apostles” in the Corinthian Church. Let us read 2 Corinthians 11:4-6. “For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we

proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. I [Paul] think that I am not in the least inferior to *these super-apostles*. Even if I am untrained in speech, I certainly am not with respect to knowledge; certainly in every way and in all things we have made this evident to you.”

We do not know exactly who these super-apostles were. But, it seems like there was a big criticism from them against the Apostle Paul. If we look at 2 Corinthians 10:10, it says, “For someone (perhaps one of these super-apostles) says, “His (Paul’s) letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible.” Because of this comment, we can see in some paintings that Paul was not depicted as good-looking. Paul even confessed that he was not a good preacher, saying “I am untrained in speech.” On the other hand, these super-apostles thought they were good looking and great preachers. Furthermore, it seems like these super-apostles proclaimed a different Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel. I believe that’s why Paul and Timothy wrote today’s passage in 2 Corinthians. Let us read in 4:5, “We [Paul and Timothy] do not proclaim ourselves, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’s sake.... 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.” And the key image for Paul and Timothy was “Treasure in clay jars.”

What is our treasure? And what are our clay jars? We come to the church for various

reasons. We are building our faith community together, and we are serving the church, and we are reaching out to the community. And there will be a time for challenge, just like Paul and Timothy had. At that moment, what is our treasure? Do we have Jesus Christ as our treasure? Do we have ourselves as our treasure? If we have ourselves as our treasure, it can be shaken and broken. We need ourselves, our beauty, our good health, our good relationship, our pride, and our ego. But these can be challenged. But if we have our Jesus Christ as our treasure, we cannot be knocked out, even though we might be knocked down. Then, it is okay that we are fragile and weak, as we have our treasure, our Lord Jesus Christ. We might lose our beauty, and we might lose our health, our good relationship, our pride, and our ego. But the death of these will lead us to life! When we can die for Jesus's sake, when we can give up for Jesus' sake, there will be Jesus and there will be a life.

3. Our Hardness

In the second reading from the Gospel of Mark, the Pharisees did not want to accept Jesus' teaching. Which one is better, to do good or to do harm, even though it might go against their law? Which one is better, to save life or to kill it? After Jesus' teaching, the Pharisees were silent. They could not argue against Jesus' teaching, but they could not accept Jesus' teaching. To break the law or to accept the new teaching might mean to challenge themselves and to break and destroy the beliefs at the core of their beings. They could not give up. They could not die. There was their hardness of heart. How about us? Do we accept new teachings? When we face a challenge, when we hear a criticism, do we accept it? Or do we

want to reject it? Does it feel like it is destroying ourselves? Does it feel like a death of some parts of ourselves?

4. It Is Hard To Live and To Die

It is very difficult to live day by day in this broken world. This world is neither challenge free nor pain free. There is always a challenge and unexpected struggles. And in the other way, it is also very difficult to die. Because of our lives, we do not want to die. We are beautiful. We are healthy. We are proud of ourselves. We have our reasons, emotions, and we have something we value. These are precious and important to our lives. But these are not our ultimate treasure. Our treasure is our Lord Jesus Christ. If we hold ourselves as our only treasure, we might be dying. But if we can hold Jesus Christ as our most important treasure, it might seem like dying, but it is the way of life. No one wants to die. Even our Lord Jesus Christ prayed to have the cup removed from him, to remove death and the cross from him. But Jesus added one more prayer, "Not my will, but yours be done." We do not want to die. But when we hold Jesus as my God, as my treasure, we can die. And it is painful. It feels like a death of ourselves. But it is the way of life. We do not need to look for a way to die. But when it comes, can we pray, "Not our will, but God's will be done"? It can be a death, and it will be a life. And it means that we have Jesus Christ in us.

Closing Prayer

Loving and living God, your way is different from ours. But we follow you, as you are our treasure, and you are the way to life. In Jesus' name. Amen.