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Title: Power Belongs to God

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:7

“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.”

This morning I would like to share thoughts from the title:

Power Belongs to God.

As we move, week by week, into more fully the Lenten days of testing, trial and wilderness, we are encouraged to take each step with the full confidence that God is with us. This is the first Sunday of March—another milestone of Sundays when we are to acknowledge not only our journey toward the Cross of Christ, but our collective entrance into our own spiritual struggles. The purpose of Lent is to bring us to a place of compunction; etymologically related to the verb “to puncture” suggesting somewhat of a systematic popping, breaking down or deflation of that which is over-inflated. It seems to me that too often we tend to think too highly of ourselves. We tend to ask the questions from above not with. We tend to wonder why folks won’t come to us, instead of questioning why we are going to them. We tend to look at what is going wrong in our homes, in our lives, at our jobs, and even in our churches instead of investing our time in what is working.

Brothers and Sisters, Lent is all about bring us to place of compunction; the place where we deflate our over-inflated egos. In this regard Lent’s greatest work is to help us to get-over what the African 4th Century Bishop Augustine called “the big head.”

Indeed the first part of Lent is designed to bring us to the place where we are deflated of self-glorification, deflated of pride, and where we systematically examine and expunge the sin in our lives and allow the struggles of living through Lent to make us feel uneasy. Lent encourages us to struggle with Jesus. To embody the difficulty of the wilderness; the difficulty of the ministry; the difficulty of the rejection; the difficulty of biased accusations; the difficulty of disappointment; the difficulty of people turning their backs on you; the difficulty of the cross; the pain of the cross and what feels to be even rejection from God.

Lent comes to us every year to remind that it is difficult work to be a Christian; that it takes real work and concerted effort to embody the ideals of Christ. Yet, Brothers and Sisters, Lent comes also to remind us that we do not struggle alone. Lent comes to inform us that God is with us even as we face the wilderness, rejection, biased accusation, disappointment, folks giving up on you, the difficulty of shouldering the pain of the cross and feeling what seems to be rejection from God. Brothers and Sisters, though we enter into this time of struggle and testing; we enter knowing that God is with us; we enter knowing that God will neither leave nor forsake us; we enter know that God is our strong tower; we enter knowing that though we are clay—possess an extraordinary power deep down within us that give us power to go on in Jesus name!

In our text this morning Paul declares to you and he declares to me, that God has deposited a special treasure in a frail, menial, seemingly inept clay container. Paul reminds us that God has chosen us to be

the holder of a special gift, one in which only God is able to give. Hear the word again: “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.”

Here in the text we are challenged to become more than what our exterior says that we are. Here in the text we are challenged to become more than what others think they see in us. Here in the text we are challenged to become more than what our families see than what our friends see than what the world see in us. Here in the text, we are challenged not to give up, but to realize our full potential and to trust in God’s confidence in us.

Brothers and Sisters, I’m glad today to know that I’m made of clay. I’m glad because it eases up the pressure for me to be perfect; it eases up the pressure for me to found without a spot of a wrinkle; it eases up the pressure for me to always be right; its eases up the pressure for me to act as though I’ve got all together; it eases up the pressure for me to live holier than thou—Brothers and Sister I’m comforted in knowing that I’m made of clay.....

And every now and then, God has a wonderful way of reminding us that we are made of clay; that we are given to fissures and cracks; that we will have lines of imperfection and blemishes. That we will have flaws and defects; that we have deficiencies and limitations, failing and faults. Oh we are but clay---possessing the sacred gift of God’s treasure within us! Oh we can rejoice in knowing that we are made of clay; that are given to unusual shapes, designs and colors. We can rejoice in knowing that were made of clay---because there will be times when this clay vessel is damaged almost broken.

--Yet, what I’ve come to learn is that God uses cracked clay pots! I’m not all that need to be, nor am I all that could be, I’m glad to know that God still uses cracked pots We may not be able to hold as much as we used to hold, but God still uses us so that God’s power might be known! We may not be the same shape as we used to, but God still uses us so that God’s power might be known! We may not be able to stand as much as we used to, but God still uses us so that God’s power might be known! With all of our cracks, with all of our fissures, with all of our imperfections and —God still uses us so that God’s power might be made known in the world. Brothers and Sisters, I’ve come to realize that it’s not about you, nor it is about me; it’s all about the wonder working power of God in you and in me. Its not that we are without crack, it is that God uses cracked pots so that God’s power might be made known.

As I was mediating and praying on this sermon, all of sudden it all became so real to me when I was able to place my eyes and my hands on my own cracked clay pot. When I graduated from divinity, our class commissioned an artist to design communion sets which were to be made of clay. These clay sets were to be used by us in our respective places of ministry throughout the world. Each one was unique in its own way, though distinctly similar in color and structural style. Each communion set had written on it, “Do This in Remembrance of Me” scratched on the outer edge of the plate. Each communion set was to be painted a deep scarlet. The chalice was designed in such a way that it could be held with one hand (...I guess so that us Baptist could learn now to communion by intention), but was nonetheless painted scarlet around the outer edge and inside.

For years I carried my communion in the pink Victoria Secret’s box that was passed to us upon graduation (I guess in an effort to remind us that laughter is the hand of God upon a troubled world). For years I kept my communion cup wrapped up in pink and brown tissue paper because I knew that as clay it was fragile and I didn’t want it break. I never used the communion set. Never once was it able to allow the Bread of Life to rest upon it, nor was it able to hold the Cup of Blessing. I had earned a

special gift, and I guarded that gift with my all instead of sharing it with the world—as it was intended. I felt as though my communion set was too good to be used. It was too special to be given up for everyday, ordinary use. I wanted it to sit on the shelf so I could reflect upon the hard work that it took for me to receive the set. The gift had been given, and the plan was in place....

I had kept it wrapped in tissues paper and handled it with greatest of care. But the chalice broke in my move across town and since that I time...I never took it out of the box, because it was damaged goods; I never took it out of the box, because it was no longer perfect; I never took it out of the box, because it had a blemish

I never took it out of the box, because it was defective; I never took it out of the box, because it had flaws; I never took it out of the box, because it a major fault; I never took it out of the box, because it was deficient; I never took it out of the box, because it had a major limitation. The fact that it would never be able to hold as much as the others made it completely useless to me and, ultimately useless to everyone else...it was cracked, it was broken, it was no good to anyone—what power can be made known with a cracked pot?

Yet, what I saw as a major defect, God saw as a major opportunity. What I saw as a major challenge to one of the parts, God saw as an opportunity to display God's transformative power. For so many years, I refused to allow God's power to surge through the brokenness of the cup, because I could see its usefulness in being able to hold the sacred symbolic treasure of the "Love God." Yet now, I see the cup's potential not its deficiency. While it is not able to hold as much as the others, it is able still able to hold. And if I open myself to God's creativity, I can turn it a little and it can hold even more with my hand of creativity than without.

Brothers and Sister it is almost unreal that God would choose you, and that God would choose me, to be the carriers of that sacred treasure. It is almost unfathomable that God would choose to establish a sacred covenant of trust with a broken piece of clay, like you and me. Yet God has chosen us, Yes God has chosen us...to be the carriers of the God sacred treasure in the world. And make not mistake about it, being chosen is not about you. It's not about your name being lifted up. It's about God's power being made known. It's not about your brokenness being put on display. It's about God's power being made known through your imperfections. It's not about your sin being called out. It's about God's power being made known. It's not about your faults being examined. It's about God' power being made known! It's not about your limitations being inspected. It's about God's power being made known. It not about your failings being under a microscope. It's about God's power being made known. It's not about blemished, its not about deficiencies, its not about nor is it about your failings. God uses clay pots, so that God's power might be made known in the imperfection.

We need to no prove our worthiness of the treasure. We simply need to allow the treasure to fill the places where we feel unworthy—and in filling those places we shall proclaim God's unconditional love of humanity and our love of one another.

This Lent we are being challenged to realize that our helps come from the Lord. We have been given an extraordinary gift from God, not because we are perfect, but because God has faith in us. The treasure that has been poured into us, may stay fully contained in our clay jars; some of it may leak out of the side; some of it may leak out of the bottom; perhaps it may seem as though none is there altogether—but know this: **The very same God who poured that treasure into your clay stands ready, always, to pour more treasure into your clay—so that it may be made clear that the extraordinary power that fuels your love of one another belongs to God.**