

Three things happened this past week that grabbed my attention.

- First, I have seen an incredible outpouring of love in the form of detergent, food, and taking artwork literally off our walls to help feed hungry people. We have such a treasure among us, YOU are treasure, given our God-given desire to help others.
- Second, we had two funerals: One a week ago Saturday for Nancy Willis, at 61 years old, a youngster among us, and the other for Bea Morgan, the 98-year-old mother of Bea Taylor. Funerals remind us we are also “clay jars,” subject to deterioration and death.
- Finally, we were told this week that our affordable housing project will be awarded the tax credits we need. Congratulations to us! Today we celebrate.

Until this latter thing happened, I was focused on the story of Samuel for today, focused on what Samuel teaches us about hearing and accepting God’s call. But we know THIS story, are LIVING this story, even though (unlike Samuel) we are not children. Samuel was the last of the prophet-judges of Israel. After Samuel, there would be kings. We are more like Eli, past his prime but ever-so-gracious in doing what God asked.



But, as I said, we DID get the news for which we have hoped and prayed. Hurdles remain (as you will hear at our congregational meeting today) but today is a day for celebrating and giving thanks to God for leading us this far. Given this news, though, we now need our epistle lesson.

Why? “We do not proclaim ourselves,” this lesson begins, “We proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as ...” (to paraphrase), “[mere workers in Christ’s vineyard].” And there are large portions of the vineyard that are unlit with the light of Christ, unlit with the very light that God brought into our world. We work in God’s vineyard, but that vineyard (our world) can be a very dark place, metaphorically speaking.

Oh, God dispelled the darkness—chaos itself—pushed the void away, made the void subject to the order God created to hold the darkness away. Then God created the stars and planets. God gave our world a spin to separate day and night. Then God created US and gave us his light. And while we have life our function is to share God’s light with the world and witness to the world that DARKNESS DOES NOT WIN.

Although darkness hides in each of us, Jesus taught us how to witness to God's light, how to let God's light shine in and through us. Jesus also showed us that, as bearers of God's light, we can endure all things, even death. Because of what Jesus bore, we know that we, too, can bear all things without letting darkness win.

In our epistle lesson today, Paul called the in-dwelling of God's light, "A treasure in clay jars." Ponder that! We humans—all living things—contain the light of God, a glimmer of God, the life-spark that animates us. And God's light is a great treasure. When we let God's light work in and through us, we live in God. Acts chapter 17 verse 28 says this more poetically, "In [God] we live and move and having our being." Put yet another way, we each contain God-light to share with the world.

But, the darkness is in us, also. We die, and our God-light leaves us, or seems to. The light moves on and we with it, returning to God as the "clay jar" of our body give up its God-light.

Paul said the reason we must give up our God-light, that we must die, is so we don't forget that WE are not the source of light and life, so that we remember always that God is the light and we are mere God-bearers. This treasure we carry, God's light, dispels the darkness.

So, Paul reminds us today, we are each asked to "die" for the cause of Christ. By our deaths, by our very attitude toward death, we witness to life itself. Only the very old and the very ill WANT to die. Life is too precious to give up, at least while there is light to share and darkness to dispel in our world. Yet as we say at the end of our funerals, "Even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia, alleluia!"

"OK, Jo," you might be thinking. "We get what Paul told the Corinthians to encourage them in their faith despite their hardships. We're not being persecuted, so how does this scripture lesson apply today?"

At our Bible study this week we considered how we have experienced treasure in clay jars, to use Paul's metaphor. And the ones we thought of both relate to our church building here at Resurrection:

- Our beloved former preschool, which we gave away to accomplish our redevelopment plans, was a treasure in a clay jar. The space downstairs in which we housed Resurrection Children's Center was so increasingly out of step in comparison with other preschool facilities that we lost more and more "marketability" each year. The school was a great treasure, but the classrooms that housed the school were a clay jar.
- Our worship in THIS space is a great treasure. Here we let our God-light mingle. We have shared that light with our children, with each other, and with everyone who God has sent our

way. But the lights and roof and HVAC systems routinely fail, revealing the space to be a CLAY JAR, albeit a beloved one that contains great treasure.

These two examples of treasure show that we can get so enamored of the treasure we can overlook the clay.

Maybe your own life contains a treasure in clay jars. Maybe your treasure has been encased in clay so long you can't even fathom how to break free. Or maybe you've forgotten the clay is even there. We don't have to remain stuck; Jesus is the greatest life-changer and if you ask him, he will set you free.