

June 2, 2024  
Second Sunday after Pentecost  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

2 Corinthians 4:5–12 (Deuteronomy 5:12–15; Mark 2:23–28)

TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

When God gave His Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai, He prefaced His Words by saying:

***“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”*** (Exodus 20:2)

And **then** He spoke His Ten Commandments. (cf: Exodus 20:3–17) This preface to the Ten Commandments is important because God **first** reminds His people that He has a relationship with them. They’re the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with whom He had made a covenant. They are a people whom He loves, and He has just demonstrated His love by graciously rescuing them from slavery in Egypt and is providing for them in the wilderness purely by His divine grace. And having reminded them of His grace and mercy, He **then** gives His Ten Commandments... His good and gracious will for how they should live before Him and their neighbor.

The Commands are not a list of rules to earn redemption. No. God had already redeemed them out of bondage. His Commandments are what they are to do and not to do in response to God’s gracious love and mercy. But – they’re also to show the people how sinful they are... how far short they fall from living holy lives as God intends. They show how desperately they need a Savior.

In the Old Testament, God’s Law wasn’t made up of only the Ten Commandments. In the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, there are 613 commandments, be they civil, ceremonial, or moral laws. Each generation found it necessary to expound on those individual laws so they could be applied to all aspects of everyday Jewish life. This job fell to the Jewish rabbis and teachers of the Law. You could say they were a bit like our Federal Court system today, which has sole authority to interpret laws and apply them to individual cases. But an enormous difference is that the rabbis weren’t dealing with **man’s** law but **God’s Law**. They had a deep respect for Scripture and knew that God demanded perfect observance of His Law.

Unfortunately, as the generations went by, as these rabbis and teachers of the Law wrote their own interpretations, they built a hedge around God’s Law, making other laws and traditions to prevent people from accidentally breaking the **original** law. Their intention was good; however, by the time Jesus became incarnate, the Pharisees and teachers of the Law had developed a distorted view of the Law... a very **legalistic** view. Their religion was all about appearances. It had nothing at all to do with faith in God – but everything to do with external purity and performance.

We see this in our Gospel text this morning. The Pharisees thought Jesus was undermining their authority by not holding to their legalistic interpretation of the Law. They hoped to catch Him doing or saying something in which they could bring charges against Him. And as Jesus and His disciples were walking through a field, plucking heads of grain to eat, the Pharisees believed they'd caught Him. They said:

***“Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”*** (Mark 2:24)

While it was true that the **letter** of the Law of Moses prohibited all forms of work on the Sabbath, (cf: Exodus 31:13–15) including the harvesting of grain, (cf: Exodus 34:21; Deuteronomy 5:14) the **spirit** of the Law allowed the disciples actions. According to the Pharisee's interpretation, they wanted to pronounce the disciples **guilty**. However, like any good attorney advocating for his client in court, Jesus cites case law, which had already set precedence, pointing to David, who received holy bread from Abiathar, the high priest, because no other bread available.

David set aside the ceremonial Law because of a need. His men were hungry and needed to be fed. The disciples also had a need. They, too, were hungry and needed to be fed. And what they did **was not** a violation against any civil, ceremonial, or moral law, but merely a defiance against man-made legalism. Then Jesus made His closing argument, saying:

***“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”*** (Mark 2:27–28)

Jesus explains that it was never God's intention to make mankind slaves of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made as a blessing for man. It's a day of rest and spiritual restoration. It's a day to gladly hear and learn God's Word and receive His gifts. And when Jesus says, “...***the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath,***” He's saying that He's Lord of all. He's the author of God's Law, and as author, He alone has sole power to interpret the law and apply to individual cases, and to declare an end to the ceremonial Law. He doesn't want you observing the Sabbath just for the sake of sitting around doing nothing – but to delight in the Law and Gospel of God's Word and be spiritually filled.

The Ten Commandments point us to Jesus. He alone lived the perfect life that God requires – not only in keeping the Ten Commandments perfectly but in keeping all the Old Testament Laws, and fulfilling all the prophet's had written about Him. (cf: Matthew 5:17) Today, the Ten Commandments continue to show us our sin and drive you and me to Christ Jesus for His perfect obedience in our place and His atoning sacrifice for our sins because we cannot live as God demands. Examine yourself against the Ten Commandments. Look at those things you have done and have left undone. You have not loved God with your whole heart and you have not loved our neighbors as yourselves. You justly deserve God's present and eternal punishment.

But the Good News is, Almighty God, in His mercy, has given His Son to die for you, and for His sake, forgives you all your sins. From before the foundation of the world, God saw you dead in your sins and trespasses and demonstrated His love for you that while you were still a sinner, Christ died for you. (cf: Romans 5:8) Similar to the Israelites, by God's grace and mercy, you have been redeemed out of the bondage of your sin. In Baptism, you were filled with the gift of faith and the Holy Spirit, and clothed in the righteousness of Christ. It was at the font where God:

***“... shone in [y]our hearts... the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*** (2 Corinthians 4:6)

It's a priceless treasure given to you by God. Like St. Paul in our epistle text, you and I have this treasure in jars of clay... treasure in the earthen vessels of our bodies. The God who spoke light out of the darkness in creation (cf: Genesis 1:2–3) and formed Adam out of the dusty clay of the ground (cf: Genesis 2:7) has filled you with Christ. Jars of clay are cheap, they're fragile, and nothing remarkable in themselves – but they have a purpose. What matters is not the jar but the One who fills the jar and what the jar holds.

Now, more than ever, you dear Christian, know how fragile life is in this broken and sinful world. You know what it is to be afflicted in every way, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, and given over to death. (cf: 2 Corinthians 4:8–11) You are jars of clay. It's the human condition: a result of your sin and sin in the world.

But Christ took on your clay. Just as you and I are nothing more than dust, earthen vessels, weak and frail, so too, Jesus took on the clay of our bodies. He didn't come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them. (cf: Matthew 5:17) His Ten Commandments are still God's good and gracious will for how you should live your life before Him and your neighbor. Can you do it as perfectly as He commands? Of course not, but that does not mean you shouldn't try. You're a jar of clay filled with God's priceless treasure. That is:

***“...the death of [Christ and Him crucified], so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in [y]our bodies.”*** (2 Corinthians 4:10)

By His grace, you're filled with Christ and united with Him in His death and resurrection. While He has fulfilled the Law, He is Lord of the Sabbath and is your true Sabbath rest who, by virtue of God's mercy, He transforms you to become more and more like Him in your daily lives through the work of the Holy Spirit through the His Word. (cf: Romans 12:1–2) As you fail to resist temptation, He overcomes temptation in your place. As you suffer affliction, persecution, suffering, and death, you know that He has already faced these things and more – for you – even dying on the cross. His vessel of clay was crushed for you and was buried in a tomb. But death couldn't hold God's own Son. He raised Him in glory, and that changes everything.

You and I were in darkness, but the light of Christ has shined in our darkness and given us life and the knowledge of the glory of God. We're jars of clay, but He has filled us with His grace and every blessing, making us precious beyond words. We are cracked pots, humble vessels, but He has covered us with Himself, and God now sees you as precious and beautiful both inside and out.

In this life, you will be afflicted. But by God's power, you will not be crushed. You may be perplexed and struggle to understand why God allows tribulations in your life, but trusting and clinging to Christ you will not be driven to despair because you have true hope in Christ. You may experience persecution, but you're never forsaken. You're filled with Christ. You may be struck down, but you cannot be destroyed – for you are united with Christ. The worst thing that can happen in this life is that something throws you into the arms of Jesus in life everlasting.

You have this treasure in jars of clay because the surpassing power belongs to God and not to you. In Christ, the future for jars of clay is glorious. Unless Jesus returns soon, the time will come when your jar of clay will have served its purpose on earth. You're dust and to dust you shall return. (cf: Genesis 3:19) Your body and mine will die and return to the earth – but that's not the end.

The almighty God who spoke light out of the darkness in creation, the God who got down into the dust of the earth and formed man with His hands and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils will one day, take your lifeless body and transform it to be like Jesus' glorious body, raising you from the dead to a life that will never end. (Philippians 3:20–21) What exactly this looks like, we don't know. But what we do know is that our transformed bodies will no longer be subject to sin or the consequences of sin. They will never face affliction, suffering, or death. What is today a humble jar of clay and earthen vessel will be re-created as a vessel of beauty and honor. Perfect. Holy.

What is a Christian to do until that day? God doesn't want you legalistically observing the Sabbath and His other Commandments only for the sake of external purity and performance – but that you delight in the Law and Gospel of God's Word and be spiritually filled so that the life of Jesus be manifested in your bodies in this unbelieving world so that others might come to know the One who desires to fill their jar of clay with Christ and His priceless treasure.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,  
Amen.