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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
June 3, 2018
2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Deuteronomy 5:12-15, Mark 2:23-28
Hymns: 1; 297; 416; 413:5-6 (242:1-3)

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

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 4:5-12

⁴⁵For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. ⁸*We are* hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So then death is working in us, but life in you.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: In those days there were Super Apostles. --

If you were going to name a super apostle which name comes to mind? Some people might think of Peter because of the wonders of Pentecost and the many miracles of healing done through Peter. Others might think of the Apostle Paul because of his long arduous mission journeys, and of course all of the epistles of Paul that are part of the inspired Word of God.

Getting caught up in personalities was one of the difficulties that found its way into the Corinthian congregation. In fact in Paul's first epistle to this congregation it was necessary for Paul to address a party spirit that divided the congregation, some being "fans" of Paul, others of Apollos, and still others of Peter. While that epistle should have settled the matter the devil gave this false emphasis on personality a new twist. Preachers had arisen who were considered "super apostles" because they were so dynamic, with great oratory skills. They just attracted great followings. These "super apostles" were rather critical of Paul, seeking to diminish Paul in the eyes of the Greek Christians for whom oratory and philosophy were such a huge part of their culture. So it was necessary for Paul to address this matter in this epistle to the Corinthian Christians. And yes, it was necessary for the gospel's sake for Paul to present a defense of his own apostleship, but first and foremost it was necessary for Paul to set the record straight concerning the true power of our salvation. And this is the lesson the Spirit would lay upon our hearts this morning:

THEME: Revealing the Surpassing Power of God in the Gospel.

Paul's point to the Corinthians was that it was not about how super special the preachers or super apostles were that had captured their attention, and their devotion as well. It is about God, only and always about God.

I. God's Gospel Light Overpowers the Darkness within Sinful Hearts

Paul called for the attention of the Corinthian Christians to be drawn back where it belonged. He wrote in the opening two verses of our text:

2 Corinthians 4:5-7 “⁵For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. ⁶For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

It is too easy to judge the sermon by the preacher. Some are better speakers than others. Apparently these newly discovered preachers in Corinth made the Apostle Paul look kind of bland and boring. But it wasn’t about Paul. It was and is, and ever shall be about Jesus! Paul wasn’t seeking disciples for himself. He was proclaiming the gospel of Christ. It is the kingdom of Christ that is the kingdom of God’s grace. It is Jesus who rules the hearts and the minds and the lives of His children.

This doesn’t happen because we are naturally enlightened. By nature we are caught in the darkness of sin and death. Our natural mind is enmity against God. We rebel at everything God says because we are convinced that our way is better. **That is darkness.** That is **deep** darkness. The only power that can dispel that darkness is the power of God. That is why Paul appeals to the tremendous act of God’s creating power when He called forth, “*Let there be light and there was light!*” Nothing less than that almighty power of God can enlighten our hearts. God enlightens sin darkened hearts with the gospel of a crucified Savior who gave His life for us to redeem us from sin and death; the gospel of a Savior who rose to life again on the third day. This gospel, Paul wrote to the Romans, “*is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.*” (Romans 1:16) This gospel is the power of God unto salvation that dispels the darkness of our hearts. This is no less an act of God, a powerful almighty act of God’s Word than when God said “Let there be light!”

It wasn’t Paul’s power. It wasn’t Paul’s intellect! It wasn’t Paul’s oratory ability. It wasn’t Paul’s anything. Just as it was only God who created light on the first day of the world’s existence, so it was God, and only God that created that faith in your heart so that you know His Son to be both Savior and Lord of your life.

But wasn’t it Paul who came to Corinth and faithfully preached this gospel? Wasn’t it Paul who spent countless hours instructing these

Greeks Christians in the truth of the Gospel? Surely he deserves some of the glory for the all the work he and others like him did!

What is Paul? What are any of us who preach the gospel or testify to the truth of Jesus? Paul teaches us that --

II. God's Gospel Treasure Is Stored in Plain Clay Pots.

2 Corinthians 4:7 "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."

Earthen vessels. Yeah, we can sort of get that idea of being earthen vessels. Even though we have living flesh and blood bodies, one understands that at the end of our lives we return to the ground from which we came. But that is not all that Paul is saying. That is why the expression "clay pots" works better to communicate the Spirit's message for us.

You know there are all kinds of ceramic pots out there in the world. Some are very ornate. Some are considered works of art. If you watch Antiques' Road Show on PBS you may have seen that some decorative pots can be valued at many thousands of dollars and should not be used for common ordinary use like a door stop or an umbrella holder. Then at the other end of the spectrum you will find ordinary clay pots. They may even be a bit irregular. People might store beans in one, water in another. Garbage for the compost bin in another. It doesn't really matter; they are just clay pots and may easily be replaced. The pot itself isn't important.

Ahh! But now God has chosen clay pots to hold a treasure! God has chosen clay pots, nothing of any glory or worth, to hold and be used for the distribution of a most fabulous and refreshing gospel. We are so blessed that God has chosen to use us as His vessels of the gospel. He has given us such meaning and purpose in life that we might be the vessels of this wondrous good news. One must wonder how this can be! And yet it is! But the conclusion of the matter is that the clay pot is still a clay pot. The vessel isn't what's important, but what's inside of the vessel!

And then we cannot miss the point, it is all about the wonder of grace and saving power that is from God. In the gospel the

righteousness of God is revealed. That righteousness of God is everything that was needed for our salvation. That righteousness of God is everything about Jesus, everything that Jesus did, everything that Jesus secured that we might be saved. That is what is so glorious! That righteousness of God is everything about God knowing us, choosing us, calling us to faith and preserving us in faith unto salvation. That righteousness of God is the marvel of God's power by which we know we have eternal life! It is so glorious and yet all this power of God unto salvation has been brought to you again this morning in a clay pot, a broken down clay pot at that. God did it this way that there should be no question that the excellence of the power is of God and God alone.

Yes, we have some famous preachers in the world today. Some of them demand and receive \$54 million dollar airplanes so that they can do more of Lord's business. You think they might mistakenly believe that at least some of the power is of them? Some are so slick, well at least their hair is, and their teeth are so pearly white! You may see this or that preacher standing on the stage of a mega church with many thousands in the audience (I'm not sure if it is a congregation.) They love the praise. They love their place on the bookstore shelves. And yes, many people mistakenly believe there is power resting in that personality.

Perhaps the most famous of all American preachers passed away not so long ago, and I wouldn't presume to cast aspirations on his own estimation of honor or power, but many in the media fell all over themselves giving him honor and ascribing much power to this reverend. At best, he was just a clay pot, and a flawed pot at that, just like the rest of us. Nothing makes that case more than one's death. He didn't save anyone any more than I have or you have. That power is with God, and to God alone be the glory.

In the mean time we face many challenges to our faith in this life. In the mean time we may experience the devil's opposition which may come against us with a fervor that can be intimidating to say the least. The concluding lesson of our text is important for us to comprehend.

III. God's Gospel Power Prevails Against all Adversaries.

Paul knew what it was like to face the world's opposition as the world is directed by the devil. It came in many ways, including prideful preachers of the gospel who were critical of Paul's plainness. Oh, but Paul had seen a great deal more of the world's power than that, and so declared:

2 Corinthians 4:8-12 “*We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— ¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So then death is working in us, but life in you.*”

Paul learned an important lesson in all that he had faced as a messenger of the gospel and an ambassador from Jesus Christ to the gentiles. As intimidating, as powerful, as mean spirited and cruel as the world may be; the world is no match for our Savior God. On the night before His crucifixion Jesus said, “*These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*” (John 16:33) The power was in the word of the Lord. Jesus' might and dominion was established by His victory over death and the devil. The world had nothing on Jesus, and so the world cannot overpower the gospel. The world cannot prevail against the Lord's Church. Indeed Jesus declared of His gospel and the church built upon the truth of Jesus Christ that “*on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*” (Matthew 16:18)

Paul didn't make a big deal of all he had faced, of all he had overcome, of all that he had accomplished. The power was and is and always shall be the Lord's. And that is exactly why we need not be intimidated or even discouraged, or, heaven forbid, pessimistic about the future of the gospel ministry. The power of God is constant and it is brought to bear upon sinful hearts through the proclamation of the gospel, that gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, and isn't it a marvel that God chose to demonstrate that is it all His power working man's

salvation by storing and then disbursing that treasure, that glorious gospel of our salvation in ordinary clay pots.

To God alone be the Glory!

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)