

"GOD MAKES JARS OUT OF TEACHERS!"

2 Corinthians 4:1, 5-11

Now to Him who by the power that is working in us can do far, far more than anything we ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations, forever and ever. {Eph 3:20-21}

I can still see it in my Mom's lower right cupboard, right there in the same place for over 30 years. It was solid **dark blue** ceramic jar, round in the middle, narrow at the top (about this big). It had a matching cover which simply rested on the opening. I don't know who made it. I don't remember when we got. I don't know what happened to it after Mom died. But I sure would like to have it back again. It was a plain, boring, mundane piece of ceramic with no bright colors or decorations. That jar was a treasure to us three brothers because it contained Mom's chocolate chip cookies or ginger snaps. We knew exactly where to look to find those homemade treasures. It didn't take long for my own kids to make that plain, blue jar an instant treasure because of what was inside.

Dear colleagues in the ministry, you are taking a couple of days off to travel to Schofield for your annual Lutheran Teachers' Conference. **On behalf of our staff, we welcome you!**

But I have a sneaking hunch I know why you plan this conference at this time of year. This may not be the case for you but I've been around teachers long enough to know that this is the tough time when teaching gets tedious and learning takes a vacation. It's mostly **cloudy**, rarely **sunny**, always **cold**, and sometimes **snowy**. It feels like spring is 8 months away yet and you kinda just feel blah. Some of your students still don't do their homework, they forget their lessons, they don't practice their instruments, they don't know their memory work or hymn verses, they still have makeup work from December. While you're glad to see them arrive at 8, you're even gladder to see them leave at 3!

So you've come to conference today a little bit chipped, cracked, splintered, fractured, maybe even shattered. You've come to the right place – not because this is St. Peter Lutheran Church, but because you've come to worship **the Master Teacher**, Jesus Christ your Savior. You've come to feast on the treasures of Word & Sacrament to renew and refresh, to revitalize and rejuvenate your hearts so that you can serve Him better in the ministries in which His Spirit has placed you.

May that Spirit be with you now as we ponder the great truths which the Apostle Paul provides us in this classroom today as his lesson teaches us:

"GOD MAKES JARS OUT OF TEACHERS!"

1. So Jesus' light shines from our darkness
2. So Jesus' love spreads through our ministries

1

At this time, Paul was up against certain men in Corinth who considered themselves "**super-apostles**". They criticized Paul and his ministry because he wasn't the most eloquent of speakers. They turned believers away from a gospel of pure grace to a system of **you need to do more**. These wolves in sheep's clothing boasted of their own righteousness as a tagalong with Christ's righteousness. Paul was very concerned that this false yeast would spread through the whole dough. In Chapter 11, he wrote: **I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your mind may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ...** {2 Cor 11:3}

Paul knew God called him to ministry. **Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.** Paul experienced that mercy first hand in his conversion from being **the persecuting terrorist** to becoming the pastoring teacher. He tasted that sweet Gospel of Jesus and his love for him in forgiving his past and calling him to service. God made Paul a vessel, a jar into which he placed the treasures of His grace. And he never forgot his roots. He never forgot **how Jesus' light shined from his darkness**. To Timothy he wrote: **I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has given me strength that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy...** {1 Tim 1:12-13} That's why he never lost heart. No matter what the circumstances or who the opposition, his strength came from the Gospel, **the power of God**. (Rom 1:16)

God has entrusted you with a ministry that's not about you. **5 For we do not preach (add teach) ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.**

We can't teach about ourselves – what's there to teach about? You and I were conceived from sinful parents with the curse of death and damnation upon us before our birthdays. We were **lost** in sin, **condemned** to hell, **enemies** of God, **blind** to his love, and spiritually **dead** in our hearts. **We were hopelessly groping in spiritual darkness** forever doomed with an eternal sentence of punishment. And with our sinful natures haunting our every move, our thoughts, words, and actions to our students, to our colleagues, to our parents, to our Education Boards still anger God to the fullest. I don't know if your salary is Synod code, above it, or below it. But when it come to **The wages of sin**, we are earning top dollar!

But don't lose heart. Jesus loves you! Jesus didn't fail you or me, but took our weaknesses, our failings, our transgressions to the cross where He paid for everyone of them with his blood. **Jesus' body given and His blood shed for you for the remission of sins.** That pure gospel assures you: **The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.** {1 John 1:7} **Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.** {Is 1:18} **But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.** {Is 53:5-6). Christ went to the cross to suffer your hell, to die your death, earn freedom from eternal judgment from God forever. At your baptism, the Holy Spirit called you out of darkness and handed you the treasures of Christ's forgiveness. Through faith in His work of redemption, you know Jesus. You believe Jesus. You trust Jesus. You love Jesus. The knowledge of the glory of God is knowing what Christ has done. Now YOU BELONG TO HIM! **His light shines through the darkness from which He has called you.**

2

Like Paul, let us not forget our roots. Jesus' light now shines from us who were once in darkness. Now these Gospel treasures are **yours to spread through our ministries** which is why **GOD MAKES JARS OUT OF TEACHERS.**

Paul uses the image of a fragile clay jar to impress on his hearers that it's not the jar that's valuable, it's what's inside! **7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. It seems odd** that God would entrust this Gospel treasure in fragile, brittle, jars like you and me. You'd think he'd want it in something really strong and safe, someone solid who doesn't chip or crack. Because after all, **8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.** We all **go through those difficult times** in every aspect of our lives (not just teaching) when we are at the breaking point, when we jars are close to cracking and chipping. Paul went through them, pastors go through them, teachers go through them.

And yet **GOD chose to MAKE JARS OUT OF PASTORS & TEACHERS** for a purpose. And that purpose is **to spread those Gospel treasures through our ministries.** Paul says: **10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.** God wants the message of Christ to be seen and heard. That's the means the Spirit uses to bring a soul to faith. God uses us fragile, breakable jars, and our ministries **to share Jesus' love to others,** and then the results are up to God's power. God gets His work done through our teaching, through giving the example of how we focus on the life & death of Christ in our lives, through the strength we fragile jars have by leaning on Christ and His cross for strength. We let His light shine in our lives thus drawing attention to the grace and mercy of our Savior and not ourselves! There is this all-surpassing power we have from God, and not from us. And when we are hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down in our ministries, we carry around the death of Jesus so his life may be revealed through the Gospel that is in our hearts! **WE MAY BE DOWN, BUT WE'RE NOT OUT!** There's our strength, there's how we pick ourselves up and keep on going as Paul says in Philippians: **I can do everything through him who gives me strength.** {Phil 4:13}

GOD HAS MADE JARS OUT OF YOU TEACHERS! He has placed His treasures in your hands via the calls you hold. **Be renewed to share** those treasures with your students and model your Savior who gives you strength in all circumstances. **Be rejuvenated to lead** those lambs to the pastures of God's Word where they find His mercy and love. **Be refreshed to let Christ** shine through your lessons, your lives, your confessions of faith and show the power that is in you to teach Jesus every day in every way. Yes, you may be a bit cracked, chipped, or broken, but you're not **crushed, in despair, abandoned, or destroyed.** He is with you every day in every class with every student. God bless your ministries to your students to teach them how **Jesus loves them enough to take them to heaven one day.**

I pray this conference helps you to patch up the cracks, fill in the gaps, glue together the pieces so that you can be those clay jars holding the treasures of the Gospel to show **how this all-surpassing power is from God, and not from us!!** May God bless you clay jars and your valuable ministries!! **AMEN**