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2nd Corinthians 4:5-12:

The Indestructible Treasure

- I. Fragility
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Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
Decatur Illinois 62526

The Indestructible Treasure

Text: 2nd Corinthians 4:5-12

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

When my younger brother was at university, my parents and I visited him often. As any parent or sibling knows, this can be an excellent opportunity to take small weekend getaways and see a school-stressed face! There was one visit where we were bringing him home for a weekend. We stopped at a breakfast joint that I had never been to before. Their breakfast was quite good. To add to the appeal, the branded coffee mugs that decorate the restaurant add an extra charm that is hard to describe. They are made of clay and painted in all sorts of bright colors. I desperately wanted to buy one.

While we were paying the bill, I saw one lonely clay mug on the shelf behind the register that was painted in my favorite color. Thanks to my mom kindly insisting on buying me that pretty orange mug, I was thrilled to have it and brought it to Church for my morning coffee. The next day, I promptly headed for the Church kitchen. I placed my coffee in the machine, ensured it had water, and was ready to start my day with my new mug. I reached for it in the cabinet, grabbed the mug, and stepped toward the machine. Before I knew it, I looked down to see it broken into pieces. I had stumbled and dropped it on our hard tile floor. I stared at it briefly as if I had destroyed some valuable vase or fancy fine china. As anyone would, I shamefully grabbed a broom to sweep it up and put it in the garbage can where it belonged. I was devastated.

I. Fragility

Fragile, weak, perishable, claylike, and cheap are all words that fit our description as sinful human beings. As pretty as we may try to make our appearance on the outside, the reality still stands that, like the apostle Paul describes the humanity of the ministers of the Word in our text, we are like fragile clay due to our sins. Our bodies, created to be imperishable, became perishable when the human race sinned against our Lord. Our selfish reliance on ourselves and our playing God corrupted us to the core and made us incapable of knowing the love of God. Like the clay mug, our relationship with Him is shattered into pieces. As a result, what is left should be swept up and put in the garbage can where it belongs. Our rebellion has earned us a one-way ticket to eternal suffering and just punishment. As the psalmist says in Psalm 145, “The Lord preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.” This verse serves as a powerful reminder of the consequences of our sins and the need for forgiveness.

Consider for a moment how easily we stumble and break in our sin. Consider how quick we are to run to sin for comfort or how quick we are to justify sinful actions before our Lord and Savior. We need to be reminded daily that the punishment for sin is not a joke. That punishment, resulting from our misdeeds, is what required God in the flesh to suffer and die for us. Hell is just as real as Heaven is, and it is most certainly where the Lord sends those who put their faith in themselves, their works, and their sinful desires. Look around you today and see the sinful and complete and utter reliance on our man-made wisdom, knowledge, technology, ethics, morality,

and strength. It is not just the unbelievers who participate in this; we can also become guilty of it. As sin in the world continues to increase, no one can deny that this God-created world has rejected God in droves, along with what has been revealed about Him in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The wake-up call does not end there. If we genuinely and honestly search the depths of our hearts and minds, we see that what we are, what we think, and how we act often oppose what God wills for us. I want to share a verse from the Word of the Lord recorded in Jeremiah 17:10. It states, "I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds." This word should instill a proper fear in us all. When I read this text, it causes chills to run up my spine. The Lord knows my heart and mind, and He knows the worst, most destructive, and sinful thoughts that have ever crossed my mind, even for a moment, and He knows just the same for you. This should cause us to tremble and bow before Him in humble repentance. This should cause us to have the rudest awakening imaginable so that we turn and run to His promises above all else. We are fragile, weak, perishable, claylike, and cheap beings who, without Christ, would be dropped from the presence of God and shatter under His judgment.

II. Indestructibility

Looking further into the context of the text, we see that the apostle Paul mainly writes about ministers of the Word like himself. Our pastors, whom God has called through the Church to serve in our respective congregations, bear a responsibility to the children of God to preach the Word in its truth and purity and to administer the Word and sacraments rightly. This is a heavy load to bear, and we praise God for having given us capable men across the world to bear it with the help of the Holy Spirit. The apostle goes on to describe for us the sufferings that our ministers of the Word endure in verses 8-10, where he says, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies."

Though this refers to ministers of the Word, this description fits all our Christian walks through life. It is unique to pastors in that they have this indirect divine call and stricter responsibility, but as the priesthood of all believers, we, too, hold the Gospel treasure within our hearts. God calls a layperson not to witness publicly as a pastor but privately to share the Gospel of Jesus with others. This verse reveals that sin is still in the world as we navigate through life, and temptation still falls on us as we strive to keep God's Word in response to His love for us. The Lord God promised us that we would be hated for being followers of Jesus Christ and that we would not enjoy a Heaven on earth but would rather suffer for His sake. We may be fragile jars of clay in that respect, but in contrast to the sinful world, we are jars of clay that hold the knowledge of God revealed in Christ.

Our Epistle lesson brings this fact out, which is of great comfort and assurance in displaying what we have in Christ. It states in verses 6 and 7, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the

surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” We have this treasure, this surpassing power that belongs to God, in something made out of a material that can break from a slip of the hand. This power is the light of the knowledge of God revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. While this clay, this sinful body, is destructible, this treasure of God is indestructible. As a result of the forgiveness of sins found in Christ alone, it will never perish, nor will it fade away from His children. And by faith, our bodies on the last day will be indestructible because of God's love in Christ. We have great comfort and security in knowing that God's love and power are unshakable, no matter how fragile we may be. The apostle portraying our bodies in this way magnifies the mercy and love of God in the forgiveness of our sins. Luther said, “Our hands and our tongues are indeed perishable and mortal things, but through these means, through these perishable earthen vessels, the Son of God wants to exhibit His power.” When we look at ourselves, we see brokenness and weakness from our sins. But when we look to the cross and empty tomb, we see the most glorious treasure imaginable. We see forgiveness, love, and compassion that overturn our wrongdoing. We see justification by grace through faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

III. Immortality

The most important aspect of this imperishable treasure from God is that it grants us eternal life to be with Him in bliss. Above all, it takes away our fragility and sin and reveals indestructibility here on earth, allowing us to look forward in the hope of immortality. Despite our physical death, God in Christ has granted us eternal life in body and soul. Here on this earth, we are capable of dying and will eventually die, but we cannot be spiritually destroyed, making us indestructible. Along with this indestructibility, immortality is realized when we die and when our Lord returns to judge the living and the dead. The day will come when we are no longer in time and space, but eternity is before us. This is not only the case for us because we believe but also for those who do not believe. As Daniel 12:1-3 states,

“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

Fellow jars of clay, the time to let the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in Christ shine in the faces of others is now. The time to tell those you care about that Jesus Christ died for their sins is now. This cannot be stressed enough. There will come a time when it will be too late to tell of Christ to the ones you love and to those around you. If that scares you, that is precisely what you need to hear. Jesus is going to return as He said. He will judge to damnation those not in His light but in the darkness of sin. The immortality granted to all people on that last day will send all of us to one of two places. If, by the grace of God, a person believes in Christ's satisfactory atonement, they will be in eternal bliss. If they reject what God has offered them in

the Gospel treasure that resides in our hearts by their own doing and sin, they will be in everlasting shame and contempt.

Since such horror is in store for those who do not believe, we make it our daily business to guard our hearts and minds against sin, death, and the devil so that this does not become our fate. And with such a treasure given to us, we guard our hearts and minds so that we may be effective vessels of the Holy Spirit in witnessing to others. As Philippians 4:7 states, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” We must continue to rely solely on the forgiveness of God found in Christ above anything else that might rob us of the peace and joy we have in Him. By the grace of God, we must die to sin and rise with Him daily so that we would not be led astray but would be ever reminded that our salvation is secure in Him.

Sin has broken us and shattered us into many pieces on the floor. But God loves us so much that He sent His son to die for us so that the broken clay, this broken vessel, this sin-filled body, will one day be perfectly intact and strong. This He did for us as a free gift resulting from His love and care at the cross. In faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have the love and care of our heavenly Father, who reassures us that He will and has made us into a brand new, indestructible clay mug. For those of us who have faith, we are a new and perfect clay mug, a new vessel in Christ that is perfectly filled with what it was always meant to be filled with—forgiveness, the indestructible treasure.

Amen.

Seminarian Lucas Abbott