



*Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Martin Luther King*

**February 11th    The Transfiguration    2 Corinthians 4:3-12**

### **Not every believer fully accepts Christ**

Paul, in **2 Corinthians 4** sets out with great theological clarity the most important reason behind the troubles in Corinth. In **2Cor 4:4** Satan blinds the mind; in **2Cor 4:6** God creates light in the heart. **2Cor 4:4** describes the problem; **2Cor 4:6** describes the remedy. The choice is ours to make.

The apostle has been speaking of the tremendous care he used in seeking to make the Truth of God clear to all, both by his teaching and by his witness of life. If the gospel Way is veiled or hidden to some, it certainly is not God's fault, and Paul does not want it to be his fault either. And yet, even as he writes these words, he is aware that ***there are those who do not want to take it all***. God is asking too much.

The truly scary part for pew-Christians is that they never become True believers. Everything they do in church worship and in the wider parish and diocesan activities is done in vain. All those works vanish like the wind, a biblical form of language meaning they **will be** lost to God. They do not see the true light of Christ shining in the Gospel. They are happy on the fringes of faith, committed to Jesus in a comfortable way, believing but without the cross.

We might want to reject this teaching, but Paul is adamant. Because some people did **not** take in the fullness of the Gospel, they are living in a state of self deception. They adopted the outer skin of a believer but did not welcome Christ into their hearts. These are the people Paul accuses of living in a state of **unbelief**, of wilfully rejecting the full Truth revealed in Jesus Christ. Their faith does not transform the way they are living. They are not producing the fruits of the Spirit and are not acknowledged by God as servants of his Son. That is the uncompromising teaching of Paul, a message directed to our pew Christians today!

Many of those to whom Paul preached had evidently never **seen** the face of Christ portrayed in the Gospel.

They were unmoved by it. To them, therefore, the Gospel remained veiled. And, since the truth was set plainly before them, their failure to find the living Christ was not a failure of the **Word**. It was a failure of their hearts. They could not commit to what was being revealed and so remained unmoved. By not **seeing** the living Christ set before them, they proved themselves incapable of **seeing** it or **living** it.

### **Never underestimate Satan**

Paul notes that this **blindness** was so unnatural that it could have only been inflicted by the enemy of God – *the “god” of this world*. This is a small “g” god, claiming the status of a god because he has conned people to follow him against the One True God. Since the blinded ones were wholly occupied with things of the present life, they were prevented from beholding the Gospel light. This is my translation of what Paul is saying: *The god of this world (that is, the devil) has made blind the minds of those who do not “believe”. The result is that they cannot see the light of the good news that is the glory of Christ*. They see what they want to see convinced of their righteousness by the Prince of Lies. They then live lives of persisting spiritual ruin and sadly bring others to share their darkness. They lay claim to a life in the Body of Christ but are not. The gospel light is shining all around them, but they remain blind, easily seduced into doing the work of Satan and undermining the missionary works of the saints. They lose sight of the Living God.

### **Empty clay vessels**

Paul says that we who know Christ and live in his light are like empty clay vessels. We have a treasure inside, whatever the outside looks like. Many in Corinth could only see the clay outside, dismissing the possibility that Paul in

his teaching and ministry could possibly have a treasure to offer. All they saw was clay. They were fragile vessels that did not last. Humble vessels for important purposes. As was Paul. His vocation was to transport the holy waters of life to a thirsting world.

Paul the clay pot refers to himself as being a *fool for Christ...pressed on every side but not broken...bewildered but not yet to despair...pursued yet not forsaken...struck down yet not destroyed*...These things all come Paul's way because he lives in God's light. He is not concerned about the darkness of this world, for God's light has come into the world and darkness cannot snuff it out. No matter how much those few Christians work against the Gospel, and collaborate with the enemies of Christ, the light will win.

It is not the clay jars that have power, but the treasure that they contain—a treasure put there by God. Even the “clayest” of vessels can be bearers of God's light meant for the world.

### **Christians embrace the cross**

Those striving to follow Christ and bring Light to a world struggling in darkness will always face opposition and sometimes even death. Paul expresses this most eloquently... *I have been a night and a day in the deep. I have been in travels often, perils of rivers, perils of robbers, perils from my countrymen, perils from the Gentiles, perils in the city, perils in the wilderness, perils in the sea, perils among false brothers; in labour and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, and in cold and nakedness.*

All this simply because he preached Christ and Him crucified! His humble faithfulness in a clay exterior seemed to upset the comfortable status quo of Corinth. It would seem that power struggles, slander and gathering in groups under false prophets were the weapons of choice of those who had been seduced into the ways of this world.

Jesus suffered on the cross, and Paul had also suffered. This is important: something of Jesus'

sufferings are revealed in Paul's body—in the scars on his back from the times he was beaten—and from his stoning—and from the other evidence that he has suffered sacrificially—like Christ.

### **They oppose for they see not the Light!**

And so it is in our churches today. Those who are unable to see the treasure that is Christ shining in the lives of those around them, especially in those who are struggling inadequately (?), imperfectly and sometimes even annoyingly to bring light to those in darkness, are it seems, far from the Kingdom of God. Their darkness will never prevail. Paul is a witness to all of that. Plot, plan, abuse, batter, do what they like, the darkness will still be shining. Fantastic is it not! Amazing what God can do with cracked and broken clay pots.

Even in all that Paul, the apostles, and his companions experience, they do not lose heart. This is amazing! The people that Paul is preaching to have their minds hardened and their hearts veiled. But even still Paul does not lose heart. He does not give up and he is not discouraged. The reason why he is not discouraged is stated in verse 1. He is not discouraged because by the mercy of God Paul and his followers have this ministry. They are ministers of the new covenant, which is the covenant of the Spirit which gives life (3:6). The message they proclaim is how Christ is written the law of the Lord **on their hearts** which leads to the transformation of people's lives from darkness to light (3:3). They do not lose heart because they possess this faithful, this glorious, life-giving ministry by God's mercy. How can you be discouraged or give up when we have such an amazing treasure? This is Paul's point. How can I give up when I have been entrusted with such a message to proclaim? How can I be discouraged when I have the good news of Jesus in my life? How can I be discouraged when I have a mission with the gospel? Because of Christ, the faithful servant never ceases witnessing, whatever the cost.

We preach what God's word says and we try to live it. We do not lose heart. Paul is not being rejected. The glorious gospel is being rejected. He just tells people what it says and lives what it says. This is our hope as well in a world of growing darkness.