

**Second Sunday after Pentecost. 2 Corinthians 4:5-15.
We have this treasure in clay jars.**

There is an old story which is told, perhaps from India, perhaps from China, perhaps from somewhere in Africa, of a Water Bearer who had two large pots, each hung on each end of a pole which they carried across their neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and one half pots of water to the house.

The perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the Water Bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you." "Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?" "I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The Water Bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in compassion said, "As we return to the house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologised to the bearer for its failure. The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I let that flaw become a blessing. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you have watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my table. Without you being just the way you are, we would not have this beauty to grace our house."

Each of us is unique. None of us is completely perfect. We are all cracked pots. But if we will allow it, the Lord will use our flaws, even the things we may think are problems in ourselves, to become blessings.

Saint Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth about the treasure that we have of the message and the example and the life of Jesus. He wrote that "we have this treasure in clay jars" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Having that is never something of pride, as if what we are able to do and be is something which comes from ourselves. It is a gift. The transformation in us and what we are able to achieve comes because we are open to God who then takes and blesses even the most damaged parts of ourselves, and lets them become ways through which we are able to be blessings to others.

Henri Nouwen, a profound theological teacher, wrote of Jesus as the 'wounded healer'. It was not despite the wounds of Jesus that he was able to reach people in love. It was, and is, through those wounds. Being wounded heightens compassion. It makes connection more profound with those who are also wounded, who also recognise that they have been damaged. The same is true for us. Our wounds, our recognition of our lack of perfection, helps us to be more real with one another, to be more open, to find a deeper place where our lives meet.

Some people who are wounded feel that they only deserve to be tossed aside. It is understandable. They can feel that they are made useless by being cracked. There is a beautiful Japanese tradition which is worth reflecting on when we may feel that sense of uselessness because of our imperfections.

When a valued cup or pot is cracked it is not just thrown away. The cracks are filled with a glaze of gold. What may have seemed useless and ugly and only fit for the rubbish in some eyes becomes something more extraordinarily beautiful.

In the verse before referring to treasure in clay jars Paul wrote “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light 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.” (2 Corinthians 4:6). This light, this knowledge, this presence of God in our lives is like being filled with God.

It is sometimes said that saints are those ‘through whom the light of God shines’. That might make sense when we look at stained glass windows where saints are depicted. Light shines through them there. Many saints though were people who were far from perfect. Could it also be that the light of God shining through them shines through the cracks, the cracks and imperfections which have become blessings because they have been opened to God?

The cracked pot making flowers grow ...
The cracked pot being filled with gold and made beautiful ...
The cracked saint through whom the light of God shines ...

We are all cracked pots. That is what makes us even more beautiful and valuable to God.
Amen.

Paul Mitchell