



**Sermon: Pastor's - A Fragile Jar of Clay**  
**- Pastor Eric Goldschmidt**

Sunday Service 10:15 am – October 21, 2012 – At [Living Hope Lutheran Church](#)

**SERMON TEXT: 2 CORINTHIANS 4:5-9 (NIV1984)**

<sup>5</sup> For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"<sup>[a]</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.



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Suppose you owned a valuable work of Impressionist art—a painting by Monet or Degas or Renoir or Van Gogh. And you wanted to display the painting in a prominent place in your home. But, first, you had to frame it. If money were no object, what would you do? Would you go to Walmart and buy the cheapest frame you could find? Or would you head for a store that specializes in fine art or rare antiques and pick out a frame that would give your painting a beautiful home? Or suppose you owned a rare diamond and you wanted to show it off. Would you set it on a bed of shredded newspaper in a cardboard box? Or would you purchase a beautiful box and set in on black velvet?

In his second letter to the Christians in Corinth the apostle Paul tell us something that is counterintuitive. He tells us that God doesn't behave as we think he should; that God acts contrary to common sense. The Lord takes his most precious treasure and puts it in a common, ordinary place.

We're celebrating a couple of wonderful things today. One is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of your first public worship service at Living Hope. Another is the gift of a pastor who is celebrating 25 years in the public ministry. And that's what our text is all about. It's about pastors. It's about what they are and what God wants them to be about. It's also about you as God's people. It says something about how the Lord wants you to view pastors and how he wants you to treat them. We'll talk a bit about Pastor Todd today and about you, the members and friends of Living Hope. But mostly we'll see what the Lord has to say about faithful pastors in general. My hope is that you'll take home with you some truths that will be a blessing for God's kingdom wherever you may live in the future or no matter what faithful pastor God may send you at Living Hope somewhere down the road.

The apostle Paul begins our text with these words: *For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord.* Paul is speaking here about himself as Christ's apostle and about the ministers who assisted him in his mission work. But, what he says about himself and his assistants applies to every faithful pastor until Christ comes again. Faithful pastors do not preach themselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord. In all of their preaching and teaching they point you to Jesus, not to themselves. They do not lift themselves up as lords over you, they lift high the cross of Christ. They hold his cross before your eyes and proclaim him as your dear Lord and Savior.



Yes, faithful pastors preach the law to remind us of our deep need for a Savior from sin and death. But then they constantly apply the soothing balm of the gospel. They assure us that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Savior sent to us. They remind us week in and week out that we have a Lord who loves us dearly; that he is our friend, not our foe. They comfort us with the truth that God's Son has covered our guilt with his clean clothes and washed us clean of every stain, so that we are beautiful in God's eyes. They declare to us without a doubt that because our Lord conquered death we too will live forever in glory with him. And they calm our troubled hearts with the truth that—come what may—our Lord Jesus has a wise plan and a loving purpose for everything. He uses all things in our lives to get us all from here to home.

Today, dear friends, you are thanking God for blessing you with a faithful pastor who points you to Jesus and who has been doing so for 20 of his 25 years among you. What a blessing to have a pastor who lifts high the cross of Christ before your eyes and who preaches not himself but Jesus Christ as Lord.

And yet, Paul does say that faithful pastors do preach themselves *in a way*. He tells us: *We preach ourselves as your servants (literally, as your slaves), for Jesus' sake*. Elsewhere in some of his letters, Paul refers to pastors as overseers, as men who keep watch over the flock of Christ. And they are most certainly that. But here he calls them slaves. Not really as the English says “as your slaves” but rather “as slaves for you.” Pastors are slaves among you *for Jesus' sake*. Again, their goal is never to serve themselves, but to serve among you for God's glory and for your good. Their highest hope is that you end up in heaven with them and live fruitful lives of faith along the way. Their joy in ministry comes from being used as Christ's slaves to bring blessings and benefits to you, his dear people.

And the Lord has entrusted faithful pastors with a precious treasure to bring blessings and benefits to you. Paul writes: *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*. Now, that's a long sentence. Let's break it down a bit. Way back in the beginning, before there was anything but God, God had something to say. The first words out of his mouth that we get to hear are: “*Let there be light!*” This tells us something big about God. He is the God who shatters the darkness and breaks the gloom. From the very beginning he has bathed the universe in light.

And, still today, through faithful pastors God bathes his people with light. First, God shines his light into their hearts. It is *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God*, the light of God's grace and goodness. He shines this gospel light into the hearts of pastors *in the face of Christ*. Before pastors become pastors the Lord fills them up with the joy of Jesus. They rejoice that they have a Savior whose face shines on them. They are so thankful that Christ has cleansed them of their sins and made them homeowners in heaven that their hearts are bursting.



They can't keep the good news of Jesus bottled up. They just have to share the gospel with others so that the Holy Spirit can also call them out of the darkness of unbelief into God's marvelous light.

You can tell a pastor who appreciates that Jesus is his Savior; a pastor whose heart is saturated with the gospel. He includes himself with you as a sinner, and makes it clear that he needs Jesus just as much as you do. Because of this he preaches the good news with joy and assures you that in Christ all your sins are drowned in the depths of the sea. Thank God for giving you such a pastor—a gospel-saturated pastor who lets his joy in Jesus spill out of his heart and splash all over you.

The treasure of the gospel, of God's forgiving love in Christ, is the Lord's most precious treasure. But, what does God do with his most precious treasure? Where does he put it? How does he display it? Not in a beautiful antique frame. Not in a jeweled box. God puts his most precious treasure in a most common, ordinary place. Speaking of faithful pastors like him, Paul says: *But we have this treasure in jars of clay.* Have any of you ever been on an archeological dig, especially in a place where there was once a community? What is one of the most common things you find buried in the dirt in such a place? Shards of pottery, broken jars of clay. Why? Because clay vessels are cheap. They are utterly common. They are among the least valued item in a house. They are often handled carelessly. And, sooner or later, they are bound to break. If you've lived any length of time, just think how many dishes you've broken along the way.

God takes his most precious treasure, the treasure of his gospel, a gift that is absolutely priceless, that no amount of money can buy, a gift that was purchased by the blood of his dear Son, a treasure that is worth more than all the diamonds and rubies in the world, and what does God do with it? He puts it in pastors. And pastors are jars of clay. There is nothing special about them in and of themselves. They are fallen, fragile sinners just like you. So, why does God do this? Why does God place his most precious treasure in such common, fragile jars? Paul tells us: *to show that this all-surpassing power (the power of God's grace) is from God and not from us.* The reason God places the awesome treasure of his grace into poor clay jars is this: so that we realize that the awesome treasure of his grace can't possibly be generated or produced by these common, earthly vessels. It must be from God. It has to come from him.

The power of God's gospel, of his amazing grace, comes out of pastors, but only because it has been placed in them by God. God wants his people to recognize this about their pastors—the power is solely from God and not at all from them. Any good that is accomplished through a pastor is accomplished by God, not by the man. And your pastor would fully agree. Today and every day Pastor Todd would say, "To God be the glory, great things he has done."

So, what has the apostle Paul taught us in our text? What's the big idea that he wants us to take home with us today and to travel with us along life's way? It is this: **Every pastor is a cheap clay jar filled with God's all-**



**surpassing power.** And that includes your pastor, too. Now, that might not sound like something to say on a day we are celebrating Pastor Todd's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the public ministry. I just called your dear pastor and my dear brother a cheap clay jar. But, that's what he is. God says so. And, it's important for you to remember that. Most clay jars aren't handled with the greatest amount of care. But if you remember that your pastor is nothing more than a jar of clay, you'll want to continue to take good care of him for however long the Lord has him here. And if you've traveled here today and have a different pastor back home, or if you're still around at Living Hope when the Lord grants you a different pastor, you'll want to do the same. You'll want to handle God's jars of clay with care.

If the final verses of our text, Paul says of himself and his assistants: *We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down (literally, thrown down), but not destroyed.* Every faithful pastor is hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted and thrown down at different points along the way in ministry. It goes with the territory. But I want to thank you, the members and friends of Living Hope, for working alongside my brother for the past two decades. You have supported your pastor when he was hard-pressed so that he was not crushed. You have blessed him with wise counsel when he was perplexed so that he did not despair. If there were times when someone persecuted him with unkind words and actions you did not abandon him. You defended your pastor and spoke well of him. And, I want to thank you especially for this: when Pastor Todd was thrown down by a brain injury during surgery a number of years ago, you did not toss him aside when his clay jar was cracked. Instead you showered my brother and his family with your love so that he was not destroyed. You returned to your pastor the love of Christ that he has shared with you for so many years. So, thank you again for taking good care of the clay jar God gave to you.

I want to thank Todd's immediate family and his extended family as well today. Without your love and support throughout the years his jar of clay would have run empty and been broken to pieces long ago. It's not easy to be the wife of a pastor or the child of pastor. Peoples' expectations of you are often outsized and unrealistic. Plus, more than any other people, you know how common and fragile a pastor is. So, again, thank you so much for helping to keep this clay jar from falling to pieces and being crushed along the way.



Dear friends, my hope is that you will take this truth home with you today: **Every pastor is a cheap clay jar filled with God's all-surpassing power.** Treat every faithful pastor as a gift from God. They are earthly vessels, but heavenly treasures. Support them well financially, with your words of encouragement, with the time to tend to themselves and their families, with time to grow and learn. Let them know that they are in your prayers. Don't be upset with them when they set some boundaries for their lives. Pastors need time to be refreshed and renewed throughout the week and with regular times away for *recreation*. Although they are Christ's slaves among you, treat them as a precious treasure. Remember that your faithful pastor, whoever he may be, is a fragile jar of clay. But he is filled with God's all-surpassing power—the power of his forgiving love in Christ. So keep on doing what you've done so well today and for these past twenty years: Encourage your pastor so that his work among you will always be a joy, not a burden. Then he will continue to cheerfully share with you the joy of Jesus that helps lift your burdens and make them light.

We hear now the word of our Lord from Paul's second letter to the people of God in Corinth.

<sup>5</sup> For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> 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.

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