

SERMON: 3 JUNE 2018 – Rev Alistair Cowper

**“THE LIFE OF JESUS IS THE TREASURE WITHIN”
(2 Corinthians 4:5-12, Mark 2:24-3:6)**

It has struck me afresh this week in reading these Scriptures, that it's the life of Jesus, now at work in Jesus followers, that makes all the difference. Some call it the Holy Spirit, and they are right to do so. This is the great, priceless treasure, that waits to be discovered in all people. The life of Jesus is the power to live free from our desire to sin, free from our fear of death and free from all the fear of what others might think, or say, like Jesus, free to reinterpret the Scriptures so as to bring benefit into his hungry disciples, picking grain on the Sabbath, and healing to a social outcast sick man. No, Jesus did not fear what the religious leaders would then plot to do to him. Jesus was living free, in his Father's care, with the law of love, uppermost in his thinking and in his acting. So we too, with this life of Jesus, are invited to set out a new course, to discover the freedom of life in all its fullness.

Let me share the reading from 2 Corinthians as Eugene Peterson writes it in The Message translation.

Remember, our Message is not about ourselves; we're proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Master. All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you. It started when God said, "Light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful.

If you only look at *us*, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives. That's to prevent anyone from confusing God's incomparable power with us. As it is, there's not much chance of that. You know for yourselves that we're not much to look at. We've been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we're not demoralised; we're not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do; we've been spiritually terrorised, but God hasn't left our side; we've been thrown down, but we haven't broken. What they did to Jesus, they do to us—trial and torture, mockery and murder; what Jesus did among them, he does in us—he lives! Our lives are at constant risk for Jesus' sake, which makes Jesus' life all the more evident in us. While we're going through the worst, you're getting in on the best!

There are a few lessons we can learn from this letter of Paul's. Firstly, as he says, "all we are is his messengers, errand runners from Jesus to (those we go to)".

Secondly, we don't need to be special or sorted to carry the message. All we need to be, is a willing vessel - an unadorned clay pot - maybe the analogy today would be a reusable poly bag, something very ordinary. But clay is still a good analogy because clay is easily broken, it's fragile and it can remind us that, in many ways, our lives too are weak and fragile and can become easily broken - by sin, or by tragedy, or by the pressures of this world. We can't go through life without facing difficulty or by making costly mistakes and having regrets. And because our perishable bodies are weak and fragile, it makes it obvious that the real power, the real treasure inside, comes from God and not from our own selves.

I like the Greek word used for treasure. It's *thesaurus*. And it actually means a place for storing valuables, like a treasure chest or a treasury, rather than the treasure itself. So here's the thing about that - the life of Jesus is the treasure but our bodies are the treasury, the place to store his value. It's like in the Old Testament, in Joshua 6:19 for example, the people were to store the silver and gold, bronze and iron in the treasury of the house of the Lord. And later, David's plans for the Jerusalem Temple include a treasury. The Hebrew is *osar*, from which we get *thesaurus*. So, in the New Testament, the life of Jesus is still the treasure and the treasuries, are people, like you and me, who have discovered that God wants to empty his value into their lives, because you are so precious to God, even in our imperfection.

I like what Shane Claiborne says, we are imperfect people falling in love with a perfect God.

We know our lives are not perfect or undamaged but we know that our God loves us and accepts us as we are, and is prepared to invest in us, his very living presence. The treasure within is the life of Jesus.

The Scripture says, If you only look at *us*, you might well miss the brightness. That's because Jesus followers are just ordinary people. They're nothing special, yet they're as special as all people are special. Jesus followers are flawed as we've already said, but they have discovered this treasure within and now they are beginning to pay attention to that treasure and allow it to grow.

I wonder if cracks in the pot are actually very necessary. For without cracks, the light will not penetrate inside the pot. And without a crack, the light inside will not be seen from the outside.

In the same way, your brokenness is important. God will use it, to bring light into your broken life and to shine through it for the benefit of others. This is the good news. The life of Jesus within is the precious good news.

As this Scripture reading says, it all started when God said “Light up the darkness!” and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful.”

Surely, you will have seen lives, other than your own, lighting up when Christ draws near. The change can be very visible. It’s like people’s eyes begin to lighten up and there is a new wave of hope where before things might have been hopeless. It often happens when people discover that God loves them and isn’t ashamed of them. I get a real buzz when I see that happen and it is a huge encouragement to the church when it does.

Lord, light up the darkness, and let us see more of your glorious transformation in people’s lives here in KNEC.

The life of Jesus is the treasure within. There’s a light and power that now shines within us. And despite the pressure from the outside, the torment, the trouble, the grief, the disappointment, the hurt, the isolation, the decay, the questions and doubts we have, we are still here, because the life of Jesus is the great treasure within.

And perhaps that’s the last thing that this Scripture teaches us about ourselves and about God. It’s that in some way, trouble matters a great deal because it’s the trouble which causes the life of Jesus, the treasure to be seen to others. As Paul puts it, in *The Message*, “Our lives are at constant risk for Jesus’ sake, which makes Jesus’ life all the more evident in us”. Another translation puts it as, “through suffering, these bodies of ours constantly share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies”.

I’m sure that’s got something to do with living a life in such a way that we are prepared to lose arguments with unchurched friends, to take our place at the

back of the queue, to to serve in whatever way we can, to put our lives on the line in order to do the right thing or to stand up for someone else, basically, to be willing to lay down our lives for the sake of Jesus. All because we know that the life of Jesus is the imperishable life within.

And we don't always understand how God does it, but there is a grace given when we cast all our burdens on him, knowing that he loves us and cares for us, has placed his treasure within us and can shine his light through us and bring into being a whole new world, the kingdom of God, the new creation.

Shall we pray. Father, take these words, and separate the good from the bad, that the seed you wish to plant in our hearts, will be the one that takes root, and bears fruit, in the lives of these, my brothers and sisters. In Jesus' name. Amen.