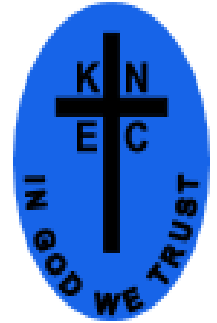




Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

www.knec4jesus.org.uk



Reading 2 Corinthians 4 : 1-12, 16-18

Sermon: 22 November 2009

The text verse 7

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”¹

Paul is trying to tell his readers in 2 Corinthians 4 that we all have cracks. No one is perfect but God.

Scholars generally agree that this letter was a later reply from Paul that he wrote to the believers in the harbour city of Corinth. They agree that we might not have all the letters that Paul sent to the congregation in Corinth. They also labelled this letter the “letter of tears” because Paul makes a very personal and intimate appeal on the believers to forgive the person that has caused friction. He also mentions in chapter 2 of this letter that he is writing it with “great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears”. The situation in Corinth was quite tense since there was fierce opposition to Paul’s ministry.

The congregation was also divided on various matters and Paul had to make sure they understand the message of God’s reconciliation with humanity through Christ clearly. That is why had to say to them explicitly in verses 1 to 7 of our reading that he is merely the messenger. The message comes from God and God has called him to minister to them. And the contents of the message are clear. It is not a secret like many philosophies or mystic religions they knew. God made himself known in Jesus Christ. In faith everyone shares in this salvation.

Paul was in opposition to the Gnostic teaching/philosophy. of his day! The Gnostic philosophy stated that only a few have received secret knowledge to know God and that the “truth” is hidden from the rest. In the congregation there were many super Christians who looked down on the rest. Now Paul is saying to them that all human being are frail and broken like clay pots. The authority does not come from humans but from God who enable them to do what He plans for them.

Paul says all human beings are vulnerable just like pots of clay. He said to the congregation in Corinth that although they are like clay pots that can easily break or chipped – in Christ Jesus through faith alone they can not be crushed, nor abandoned nor destroyed. The power of God surpasses all their suffering. They must not loose hope and fix their eyes on the temporal things like life itself but focus on the things that is unseen and eternal like the kingdom of God.

¹ *The Holy Bible : New International Version.* Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. 2 Co 4:7

It was custom in those days to store their water and food in jars of clay. They also used it to store important documents in pots of clay. When archaeologists found hidden caves in 1948 near Qumran they also found pots of clay in the caves with texts of our Old Testament hidden inside.

Now Paul also likewise stresses the point that they are like pots of clay that have a treasure hidden inside namely the salvation of Jesus Christ which they carry with them. He says although their bodies are outwardly fading away, God renews their faith every moment of every day through his Holy Spirit. They must be witnesses of the treasure in them that keeps them going despite all the suffering, sorrow, and hardship that they endure. God will indeed help them if they put their trust in him.

I do not think anyone in this church this morning will differ with Paul's metaphor. In this week I just realised once again how vulnerable, exposed, weak and broken we as humans are. I have seen this on the funerals I conducted, in my hospital visits, in everyone I talked with and yes I also realised it in myself. We are indeed pots of clay that can so easily break or be chipped by the insensitive comments of others, by sickness, by depression, by broken relationships, by the actions of others and the wrong decisions we sometimes take. It is amazing then that some of us still dare to face life without the help of God.

But this does not mean that we must accept to live as pathetic beings totally incompetent to make decisions, or to be always victims. No I think opposite is true. We are only the vessels. We must have faith, that is to say the knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in his Word is true. It is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel, that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation.

If we carry this faith with us, God transforms our brokenness – our cracks – our chips in order for us to live the Gospel of redemption despite all the suffering, all the hardship and all the problems we encounter on a daily basis. It is then that our cracks let the Light of God in, as Leonard Cohen says in his song Anthem: there is a crack in everything but that is how the light gets in! It is then that the LIGHT of God transforms us into vessels of hope, and love to others. It is then that you and I become citizens of the kingdom of God forgiving, loving and hoping irrespective of the circumstances we are in. Then we become the people God intended us to be. If there is one thing we can never ever do: as cracked pots of clay to judge others, to think we are better than others, and to broke others by our hurtful words and deeds.

As broken/chipped/ cracked pots of clay we have an enormous task. We have to proclaim to everyone around us that God can transform us through faith in Jesus Christ. He alone can make us whole again.

Let us never ever forget the words of God when He assures us of his strength in us: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed". ²

We do not have to go through life alone. We do not have to be heroes. We do not have to be super Christians. We do not have to be important, beautiful, rich, or educated. We can be just ourselves because no one is perfect. God who is perfect can use us just as we are.

² *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. 2 Co 4:8-9

May we go from here not as pathetic pots of clay, but POTS with a mission to spill through our cracks the love of God to everyone that comes our way, to let the Light in from God – to allow God to work in, through and despite us helping others!

Amen

Readings for the week

John 18~33-37

This short passage provides an insight into three very different and conflicting images of kingship. The Romans idea of a king included that of a puppet ruler like King Herod. The Jewish idea of a king, however, was bound up with the relationship between Israel, the royal house of David and the expectations of a Messiah. The third image of a king is provided by Jesus. who is neither a puppet king nor a dynastic ruler, but king of heaven and ruler of all. Pilate did not expect an answer to the question 1 am not a Jew am 17 He said it as the ironic answer to Jesus' question: it was an exclamation of incredulity — what sort of king is not recognised by his own people! God's kingdom is not, however, like our earthly kingdoms. This is what is so difficult for Pilate and others to grasp. Christ' reign is not of this world. It is a reign of truth and it is this which makes him king over everything, not just over a tiny strip of land and its chosen inhabitants.

Other readings: Daniel 7.9—10, 13—14, Psalm 93; Revelation 1.4b—8.

Prayer

Almighty God,

help me to see the eternal in all that I do,

and to work for that which will last.

Amen.

Next week suggested readings:

Jeremiah 33.14-16;

Psalm 25.1-10;

1 Thessalonians 3.9-13;

Luke 21.25-36