

The Second Sunday After Pentecost

June 14, 2009

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 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. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. (NIV)

If someone starting asking you questions about our church what would you say to them? What do we tell people who want to know what Amazing Grace is all about? Do we tell them we like our church because it has so many young families or because it has a small family type feel to it? Do we tell people they should come to our church because we have so many nice people and we do many fellowship things together? Do we point to our programs or leaders or our pastor as the strength of Amazing Grace? What do we tell people?

By God's grace we are able to tell people the same thing the apostle Paul tells the people in this letter before us. While it is a blessing to have young families, caring people, active programs, and gifted leaders - those are not the things we gather to talk about each week. There is something much greater for us to proclaim. In fact, we could summarize our existence and purpose and tell others what Amazing Grace is really all about in just three simple words: **We preach Christ. We preach Christ.**

You might say: "Well yeah, we are a Christian church what else would we preach? It should be a no-brainer that we preach about Christ." Yet, already in Paul's day churches and preachers needed to be reminded: "**For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.**" In this letter Paul was defending his ministry because some self-proclaimed "*super-apostles*" were undermining Paul and his ministry. They were bashing Paul's lowliness and simple style of preaching and teaching the Word. They were leading people to believe that true apostles would be great and powerful in worldly ways of wisdom and influence and possessions. They promoted a ministry that was man-centered. In the previous verses Paul writes about how they even used deception and distorted the word of God.

So Paul reminds the believers in Corinth what ministry is all about once again. We preach Christ. We proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, as our Lord. It is not about promoting ourselves or our ministry. We are just Jesus' servants. After all, look at what God has done through the message of Christ! 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.**" Just like God did by His powerful Word at creation when He said "*Let there be light*" and there was light, so God

has made His light shine in our hearts. Like God let light shine where before there was nothing but pure blackness and complete darkness, so God took our dark and black hearts of sin and unbelief and His light shines in us. We see the awesome glory of God in the face of Christ - in Jesus' person and work.

How foolish to preach ourselves when we did nothing! God did it all. He created, redeemed, and sanctified us. We did absolutely nothing. We didn't contribute in any way, not even in our own conversion. God created faith. He brought light to where there was only darkness. That is why Paul preaches Christ. That is why we too preach Christ. It is the only message that saves. The message of what Jesus did to save sinners, the gospel, is the most important treasure of all.

That's why it is surprising how God chooses to reveal this message. ***“But we have this treasure in jars of clay.”*** Before there were banks or safes people would sometimes store their money or valuables in a fragile clay jar or vessel. They would put shiny jewels in these unattractive containers with the hope that thieves would not think to look in something so cheap and fragile to hold such riches. Just think where God puts the message of the gospel – the message that changes people – the message that creates light where before there was darkness. Think about where God holds the most important treasure of all – in us. Paul says he is nothing but a fragile, weak, mortal clay jar. Yet, Paul preaches Christ – the most valuable treasure of all. Why does God contain this most valuable treasure in people like Paul and us? – ***“to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”***

Dear friends, our strength, our life, our hope all lies on God and not on us. That's why Paul says: ***“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”*** Because we preach Christ we may be pressed on every side, we might literally suffer in every aspect of life. We might be perplexed and persecuted and struck down. But because we preach Christ and carry around the death of Jesus in our bodies we will not be crushed or in despair or abandoned or destroyed. For God placed all our shameful, damnable sin into the sinless body of Jesus and crushed and abandoned Him so we will never be crushed or abandoned. God condemned and destroyed Christ on the cross to punish and pay for our guilt so we will never be condemned or destroyed. We not only carry the death of Jesus around with us, but the life of Jesus is also in us. Jesus rose from the grave. Inside us is Jesus' strong powerful resurrection life.

Think about what Paul is saying when he writes: ***“For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.”*** When we suffer, when we go through hardships, when we face death all day long, God uses us to reveal Christ. He uses our weakness to reveal the One who alone is our strength. Our sufferings are things God not only promises to work for our own good, but He works them for the good of others. God wants others to see how He is our hope and salvation. He wants others to see that He is our strength and our power. In our weaknesses God wants others to see Christ's strength for God wants to work life in them too. He wants to create light in darkness. So we fragile clay jars preach Christ.

How could we make a case for anything else? Do we really want our church to depend on its people or pastor or programs? Do we really want to preach about

ourselves? What case could we make before God if we were to preach about ourselves? What good would come out of giving you ways to improve your own lives by looking to yourselves to get the job done? We are but sinful, weak, fragile, clay jars. We did not nor could not lift a finger to save ourselves. But Christ lived in our place. Christ died in our place. Christ rose in our place. Christ became our righteousness and our salvation. So it truly is a no-brainer. There is one thing we need, one message far more important than others, one treasure above all else, one Savior from sin. That's why by God's grace now and in the future we at Amazing Grace will simply say with Paul: **We preach Christ.** Amen.