

“Just a Jar”

New London UMC

Sunday, June 2, 2024

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; II Corinthians 4:5-12 *NRSV*

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While I've been packing I've been re-acquainting myself with a number of things that are breakable – and that I would prefer not to be broken when I move. I know that some of these things might appear to someone else to be just another glass, plate, bowl, or jar that could be replaced. But they don't all appear that way to me. Some of the dishes I grew up with, and I have added more pieces from the pattern. Some things are gifts from family or friends. Other pieces I can remember the art fair or the place where I bought it – and why I liked it enough to buy it when I did not have a lot of “extra” money to spend. These are the things that I think about as I'm trying to pack them carefully. But I have a feeling that the movers are not going to be happy to see the stack of boxes all marked “FRAGILE!”

But along the way as I've been sorting, and moving stacks of things from one place to another, or getting tired and not paying enough attention to what I was doing – there have already been some casualties. I had an orchid plant that the women's group had given to me when I had lung surgery. It was in a ceramic pot on the table – until I swung around with a stack of books and managed to send it sailing. Both plant and pot are no more. And when I was clearing out some stuff in the garage I knocked over some cheap terra cotta pots – which really shouldn't fall over onto a concrete floor. But you know those pieces can be used at the bottom of another (sturdier) pot to help promote good drainage. (At least that's the “making lemonade out of lemons” way to think about it.)

I know that many of these fragile items share a common underlying reality. And that reality is: anything ceramic was once wet clay. And clay was once dust and water. And eventually everything that was once dust will return back to dust. Which is what Paul is alluding to in his letter to the Corinthians about our bodies being like “clay jars.” And though we don't like to admit it, we know that our bodies are really pretty fragile and breakable. From dust we came and back to dust we shall return. But it is in these “clay jar” bodies that we carry the treasure of the gospel – the good news – of Jesus the Christ. Paul reminds us that even though our bodies carry the death of Jesus in them, they also carry “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” “so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.” Which *might* leave us thinking that it's not so much **about** the clay jar, but what's **in** the clay jar.

But if we refer back to Psalm 139, we're reminded that it was God who created us and who cares about us. Indeed, God knows us so well, God already knows what we're going to say before a word can roll off our tongue. And God knows that even in our weakness we can be strong enough to persevere despite the stress and strains upon our fragile clay pots. God knows that even when we are afflicted in every way, we can choose not to be crushed. That we can be perplexed, but not driven to despair. Even when we are in the midst of persecution, we will never be forsaken by God. And when we come to the end of

our clay jar lives we will still be with God. Because God's extraordinary power and loving presence that has been with us day in and day out, will continue to be with us when we no longer need these clay jar bodies for the rest of eternity. And for that promise of endless love and care we say, "Thanks be to God." Amen.