

10am Choral Eucharist Sunday 2 June

2 Cor 4:5-12, Mark 2:23-3:6, and 1 Sam 2:1-10 – Resurrected life through Jesus is seen as Christians model Jesus' motivation and manner in dying: for others, for God, and for as long as we live.

What do you treasure? Your work? Your home? The freedom to live as you please? Maybe friendship and the companionship of others? Or perhaps marriage and children?

We know from Paul's letters that he valued very highly his close relationships with friends and colleagues. But writing to the church in Corinth, Paul says that ***treasure ... is the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.***

Paul was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were respected, and to some extent even feared, because they held the authority to interpret and enforce the Jewish law and rules shaping people's daily lives. We heard in our Gospel reading how the Pharisees responded when Jesus challenged the Pharisees for sticking to the letter of the law, at the expense of people's needs.

The Pharisees considered it their duty to maintain the integrity of the Jewish people through strict observance of Jewish law. But in Jesus' eyes, the Pharisees had developed a ***hardness of heart*** completely at odds with loving their neighbour as themselves and loving God.

There was status, control and privilege attached to being a Pharisee. But Paul gave it all up for something he considers much more valuable: the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And Paul knows that this treasure, which ***does not come from us***, is treasure we should want to share with others.

Paul contends that Christians can share that treasure through their bodies; in how they live their whole lives. Not so much in what Christians say, but in what they do. In how we live. **Living so that others can see the treasure that we have.**

It is by ***carrying in the body the death of Jesus ... by always being given up to death for Jesus' sake*** that the Christian believer's life in Jesus will be visible to others. If we model how we live on the way that Jesus met his death, people will see, in us, the difference it makes to believe in the resurrected Jesus. If our lives are shaped by the motivation and the manner of Jesus' dying, the risen life of Jesus will be visible in our lives.

Perhaps you are thinking, well, that all sounds very dramatic, and doubtless very admirable... But I'm not Paul, and nobody is going to look at my life and see the risen life of Jesus in it. It is true that when we read about Paul's life in the book of Acts from the perspective of Luke - Paul's travelling companion from half-way through Paul's second missionary journeys - Paul's life does have dramatic highs and lows. Luke tells us Paul travelled thousands of miles, planting churches and presenting the case for Christ to governors, kings and queens. Paul undoubtedly faced many difficulties.

As Paul writes to the church in Corinth later in this letter, Paul's been imprisoned, flogged and stoned; shipwrecked and in danger in the city, wilderness and at sea; he's been hungry and thirsty, cold and naked.

Paul writes of being ***afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.***

Maybe you're thinking, life isn't like that for Christians in Cambridge. In other places, it is very much like that: Open Doors, the organisation supporting persecuted Christians says 1 in 7 believers world-wide are persecuted, and that 4,998 Christians were murdered for their faith last year. Here in Cambridge, Christians are not persecuted or stoned, so much as ignored. But Paul isn't speaking here just of his life-and-death struggles.

We know Paul struggled with, and prayed about, something he describes in this letter as **a thorn in the flesh**. Maybe an ongoing health issue, but whatever it was Paul knows what it is to be **afflicted in every way**, and yet not **crushed**.

In his letters we sometimes see flashes of Paul's frustration, and occasionally hints of uncertainty and anxiety about where to go and what to do next, but even if he is **perplexed** he is **not driven to despair**.

And even in the bleakest times, when Paul feels most isolated, **struck down** and suffering with what might nowadays be diagnosed as depression, Paul is **not destroyed**.

Which is good to know, because in between the floggings and the fleeing from angry authorities, Paul was doing what we all do. Building relationships with colleagues. Patching things up with people and pressing on. And although Paul was perhaps quicker than us to learn this, discovering that it is often only when we've tried everything else, that we can bring things to God in prayer.

People will notice how we deal with the challenges of everyday life. Whatever we're going through, big or small, people notice whether we are trying to see the work of God in it. They notice us looking for the will of God, even when it is very different from what we might at first have wanted. They notice whether we're building our lives upon God. **Living for the glory of God**.

It is in depending upon God, turning to God in prayer, acknowledging our own weakness, that the risen Jesus can be seen in our lives. Our lives may not seem like the most *beautiful* settings for the treasure that is the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

In fact, as Paul observes, far from our lives being anything like the gold that sets off a precious pearl, our lives are all too similar to **clay jars**: made of very ordinary and everyday materials, and all too prone to cracking and falling apart. But because we are just **clay jars**, it is just when we can do nothing more than to hold on to God, to pray and to trust that God answers, that **the life of Jesus is made visible in our bodies**. And by living our lives in all our weakness – with the plainness and the fragility of ordinary clay jars – the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in Jesus will be seen.

Apart from a couple of Sundays in February, this is the first Sunday that we've been in Ordinary Time since November 2023, and now we'll be in Ordinary Time until we get to Advent. But even in Ordinary Time, every time we celebrate the Eucharist we are remembering Jesus' dying for us and his rising again.

We make the life of Jesus visible in our lives by modelling Jesus' dying. By putting the Father's will ahead of our own will. By living to love and to serve others. By living not just for our own pleasure, but for the glory of God, for as long as we live.