SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
August 17, 2014

Treasure in Clay Jars

Read 2 Corinthians 4:2-15

Key verses: “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” (2 Corinthians 4:7-9, New International Version).

Scott Peck’s best-selling book The Road Less Traveled begins with these insightful words: “Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult.”

This passage from 2 Corinthians 4 expresses the faith of someone who knows that life is difficult, but who has discovered how to draw on divine resources for living life.

He says “we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed” (verse 8a). The original language of the New Testament evokes the picture of a grape being squeezed almost to the point of bursting. Sometimes life can do that to us. Job stress, relationship challenges, financial pressures….

I heard about two children, a lawyer’s son and a physician’s daughter, who were playing together. The lawyer’s son said to the doctor’s daughter: “Let’s play doctor. You operate and I’ll sue.”

Stress and pressure are part of life—“we are hard pressed on every side.” But as we draw upon God’s grace, we are “not crushed.”

We are “perplexed, but not in despair” (verse 8b). Ever face challenges that leave you wondering what in the world you should do? A rebellious child, a troubled marriage relationship, a financial crisis—life can leave us “perplexed.” But we need not give in to “despair.” In Christ, there is always hope!

We are “persecuted, but not abandoned” (verse 9a). Someone has said, “People can face almost anything in life as long as they know that they are loved.” For the Christian, in times of persecution and trouble, we lean hard on the assurance that the Lord will never abandon
us. He has promised: “Surely I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20). “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). We may face persecution and trouble, but we are “not abandoned”!

We are “struck down, but not destroyed” (verse 9b). Here the language is from the world of athletics. Think, for example, of the movie hero “Rocky” slugging it out with the reigning champ, Apollo Creed. In the movie, Rocky is knocked down repeatedly, until he lies bloody and broken on the canvas. As Rocky grasps the ropes to try and pull himself to his feet, the crowd—seeing how hurt Rocky is—yells, “Stay down! Stay down!” But Rocky rises to continue the fight.

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” But how? What is the secret? Verse 7 makes clear that it’s not our own strength or power that helps us overcome. In fact, in ourselves, we are utterly ordinary—just like old clay pots.

The secret is not the pot. The secret is the treasure that lives inside the pot: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (verse 7).

Life is difficult. But in Christ we have powerful resources for living life. Thanks be to God!

(Contact Michael at mikesigler@ozarkfumc.org.)