Sunday 06/02/24 – Panama Methodist Church

Sermon Title: "Cracked Vessels"

New Testament Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:5-12
Old Testament Scripture: Psalm 34:18
Old Testament Scripture: Psalm 51:17
Old Testament Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6
New Testament Scripture: Hebrews 12:1
Gospel Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30

Communion Slide 1 (Slide 11):
The Apostle's Creed, Ecumenical Version
Communion Slide 2 (Slide 12): Prayer of Confession
Communion Slide 3 (Slide 13): The Lord's Prayer

This morning, I have a sermon prop or item to show you all. Looking at this water pitcher, you might see, if you can see it from where you are sitting, a beautiful water pitcher. This pitcher was actually a wedding gift given to Melissa and me when we got married on September 4, 2004. The gift is from the mother of my best friend from high school. We had this water pitcher in our first apartment in Moravia, NY, and we had this water pitcher in our first house in Moravia, NY. We also had this water pitcher in the church parsonage in Freeville, NY, and we had this water pitcher in the parsonage in Sidney, NY. Now we have this water pitcher, wait for it, in the parsonage here in Panama, NY!

Since this beautiful water pitcher has been moved around so much though, it has suffered some as a result. It would seem that over time sometimes things that have been one way change and become different. As we age, we often have less energy, and our bodies do not work like they used to. I am speaking to some here this morning! I remember that living through the first three places that Melissa and I lived, that we would take out this water pitcher for special occasions. It was nice to use this wedding gift on holidays and other special times, to enjoy it.

Well, by the time we got to the church parsonage in Sidney, NY this water pitcher was not the same. It was a little broken and cracked. Even so, we packed it up, and moved this pitcher last month here to the church parsonage in Panama, NY. Even though we have had this for twenty-years, and even though it was a wedding gift, I said to Melissa, "Do you want to keep this"? She said, "Yes, I would like to keep it Paul, it was a wedding gift." I said to Melissa, "I completely agree with you, but the pitcher is cracked and broken." Then Melissa said, "What if we put the water pitcher on the top of the hutch in the dining room, and turn it so we can't see the broken side"? I said, "that's a great idea"!

Sometimes in our lives we are like this water pitcher, aren't we? We want to hide our cracks, to hide our brokenness, and to hide the places where we are worn down. Many of us would prefer to hide the painful parts of ourselves, and to come to church and pretend that everything is ok. As I am speaking maybe you are

hiding some cracks, maybe you are hiding some brokenness, and maybe you are hiding some hurt this morning. Maybe you have or still do feel unworthy to be here. Guess what brothers and sisters, through Christ we are all worthy to be here this morning.

Wouldn't it be nice though to just be able to not worry about those things anymore, those cracks, breaks, chips, etc., or to feel like that we do not have to hide them anymore? We all need to repent and grow closer to Christ, and we all have our cracks, our brokenness, and places where we are worn down. None of us are perfect, only Jesus Christ is perfect. If you feel unworthy, then we are all unworthy. Except Christ makes us worthy. This church, this community of Christian faith is a place where through Christ we are all "good enough" to be here. If you were ever told you were not "good enough" Christ died for you and me. We turn to him, repent of our sin, and ask him to make us new. Not just the first time we come to Christ, but over and over again, like we will with our prayer of confession this morning. We good enough that Christ died for us, even though we all have to repent, and we all have to change. Salvation or eternity in Christ is a free gift, but becoming fully like Christ that is the journey of a lifetime. So, if you have come today with cracks, brokenness, and feelings of unworthiness, we are invited to be part of the body Christ, through Christ, for Christ, and because of Christ. He makes us worthy, as by myself can never be worthy.

I remember an interesting incident in one of the churches that I was serving in a long time ago. I saw a family, mother, father, and three kids driving down the street towards the church parking lot on Sunday morning. They were regular Sunday morning Church attenders. Yet, what I saw in the car on this particular Sunday morning looked like a pack of wild animals fighting and screaming. To this day, I do not know what the family was fighting about, as the windows were up. What I do know is this though, the mother got out of the car first, as she was the driver. I could then hear everyone shouting at each other, once the driver's side door was open. Then suddenly the mother shouted at the car, and everyone in it "Be quiet and get it together, were at church now"! Then, I kid you not, the father and three kids straightened right up, stopped arguing right and calmly came into church. That was the end of that!

(Slide 1 – Mom Before Church – Mom at Church)

It will forever be one of the coolest, scariest, and interesting things that I have even seen as a pastor! We all have our cracks, our brokenness, our hurts, etc. Do we surrender these things to God, to Jesus, or do we just carry them around like a ton of bricks?

This morning the main preaching scripture that I want read and dive into is from 2 Corinthians 4:5-12. In this scripture, in part, humans are likened to clay jars, or clay pots. Our bodies, like clay jars, or clay pots can crack, break, and even

shatter. I remember a Christian band that I used to listen to when I was younger called “Jars of Clay.” The idea that we are all clay jars or clay pots. The Apostle Paul tells the church in Corinth, or the Corinthians, in his second letter to them this morning, that we are all like clay jars.

(Slide 2 – Clar Jay Picture)

If we are new creations in Jesus Christ though, then the Holy Spirit can use our cracks, our brokenness, and our chips, to shine the light of Jesus Christ to others. You seek my friends, we are all beautifully broken, and through Christ, he can use our brokenness. We can be “wounded healers” who God uses to heal others. Our hurts, our failures, and our brokenness can end up being a way for us to help and love others. In our brokenness Jesus restores us through the power of the Holy Spirit, and the light, life, and love of Christ can radiate through our brokenness. I know there have times in my life that have been hard, times I have felt very cracked and broken, but all of that can be used to the glory of Jesus Christ. Or to put it another way, sometimes our tragedies can end up becoming testimonies. Sometimes God can use our failures to help give someone different a future. Sometimes our cracks can be used to lead someone to Jesus Christ.

Some struggle sometimes with the topic of suffering. None of us like suffering. Yet through suffering we sometimes grow even closer to God, and through suffering we can grow in empathy, grace, love, mercy, and hope. I hope

that Melissa and I never get rid of this beautiful water pitcher, because its is a reminder for us all that we are beautifully broken and mended back together through Jesus Christ. Amen?

Let us look more closely at our main scripture for this morning from 2 Corinthians 4:5-12.

(Slide 3-4 – 2 Corinthians 4:5-12)

Starting from 2 Corinthians 4:5, it says:

5 For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. 11 For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you (2 Cor. 4:5-12, NRSV).

In diving into this scripture, the Apostle Paul is saying to the church at Corinth or the Corinthians that he and those that are with him are not glorifying themselves, but Christ. The Apostle Paul goes even further saying that He, Timothy, and Silvanus or Silas, are slaves to the church in Corinth, or the Corinthians, for Christ. They will make themselves lowly, to glorify Jesus. Everything for the Apostle Paul and those with him is about Jesus Christ and his gospel. Everything is for Jesus, for he and he alone is the hope of the world.

Sometimes I have also met people that think pastors should always be assertive and look strong. I get that in certain circumstances pastors needed to do such things, but any strength pastors, priests, of any of has is because we allow God to use us. I have no strength, no power without the Holy Spirit. When I let go and let God though, he can use me to strengthen and serve others.

In the Apostle Paul being a good, trained Rabbi and Pharisee, he talks about letting the light of God shine out of darkness, alluding to the creation story in the Book of Genesis, and the power of God. This power and this glory was made present on earth in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. I mean think about it, the Apostle Paul was generationally Jewish, and was generationally of the priestly class. Coming to Christ for him was no small thing, and yet the Apostle Paul believed that Jesus was God in the flesh, the savior, the messiah, mashiach.

Even though our bodies are like clay jars or clay pots, the light of Christ can shine through our cracks, and our brokenness. The life and hope of God can flow through us, like life giving water. No matter what we face, no matter what we suffer, if Christ is in us, he can still work through us, despite what comes our way. So, within our cracks, within our chips, our brokenness, etc., Christ through the Holy Spirit can work through us (https://www.homileticsonline.com/members/item/93062069).

We are reminded in Psalm 34:18:

(Slide 5 – Psalm 34:18)

[18] The LORD is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit (Ps. 34:18, NRSV).

Like clay jars or, clay pots, or this beautiful water pitcher, over time we get cracks, breaks, and chips, but God is with is us through it all. We can also be with each other through our times of struggle. For can shine through our brokenness.

In Psalm 51:17 it says:

(Slide 6 – Psalm 51:17)

[17] The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Ps. 51:17, NRSV).

In Proverbs 3:5-6 we read:

(Slide 7 – Proverbs 3:5-6)

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.
[6] In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths (Pro. 3:5-6, NRSV).

Through our aging, our mistakes, are missteps, our cracks, our weariness, and our failures, God can work in us and through us. God can grow us and shine through us.

We are reminded in Hebrews 12:1 that we have many people that are with us on this journey of faith in life, both present and in eternity. Hebrews 12:1 says:

(Slide 8 – Hebrews 12:1)

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, (Heb. 12:1, NRSV).

Lastly, we are reminded in Matthew 11:28-30:

(Slide 9 – Matthew 11:28-30)

28 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

Whatever we face, whatever cracks we have, whatever brokenness we have, whatever failures we have, Jesus says, come to him. Come to him and he will take your burden and give you rest. Come to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with everything you have and are, lay it at his feet, what how he can you through power of the Holy Spirit. Through it all Jesus is mighty to save!

In closing, I want to tell you a short story called "Remember Rule Number 6". Here is how it goes:

Two Prime ministers were sitting in a room discussing affairs of state. Suddenly a man bursts in, apoplectic with fury, shouting and stamping and banging his fist on the desk. The resident prime minister admonishes him: *"Peter,"* he says, "*kindly remember Rule Number 6,"* whereupon Peter is instantly restored to complete calm, apologizes, and withdraws.

The politicians return to their conversation, only to be interrupted yet again twenty minutes later by a hysterical woman gesticulating wildly, her hair flying. Again, the intruder is greeted with the words: *"Marie, please remember Rule Number 6."* Complete calm descends once more, and she too withdraws with a bow and an apology.

When the scene is repeated for a third time, the visiting prime minister addresses his colleague: ***"My dear friend, I've seen many things in my life, but never anything as remarkable as this. Would you be willing to share with me the secret of this Rule Number 6?"***

"Very simple," **replies the resident prime minister.** ***"Rule Number 6 is 'Don't take yourself so seriously.'"*** ***"Ah,"*** **says his visitor,** ***"that is a fine rule."***

After a moment of pondering, he inquires, ***"And what, may I ask, are the other rules?" … "There aren't any."***
(https://philipchircop.wordpress.com/2017/10/23/remember-rule-number-6/)

Sometimes we can be absorbed by our cracks, our chips, and our brokenness, but let us always let Jesus to be our focus. Let us allow his grace through the Holy Spirit to fill us and guide us in all things. For he is the way, the truth and the life. When we let our light shine though our brokenness, this is what it looks like:

(Slide 10 – Cracked Pot With the Light of Christ)

Praise be to God through Jesus Christ, and Amen!

(Communion Slide 1 (Slide 11) – The Apostle's Creed Ecumenical Version)

(Communion Slide 2 (Slide 12) – Prayer of Confession)

(Communion Slide 3 (Slide 13) – The Lord's Prayer)