

Let me repeat the beginning of our first reading...(2 Corinthians 4: 6-10)

***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.***

***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. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.***

A former member of the German speaking Friedenskirche, who died some years ago at the age of over 90, lived in Grünwald, which is a very rich place south of Munich. Every time I visited her, she “warned” me: “Be careful, don’t be misled by the faces of the buildings. There is plenty of money and a lot of loneliness. There are many eyes filled with tears behind the most noble curtains.”

This is an image contrary to the bible text, we’ve heard: Many people in the western part of the world live their earthly lives in golden jars.

What we have to present, are

- The beautiful facades of our commercial buildings and our own accommodation
- glittering windows which promise a lot
- extravagant fashion which presents an image
- non-stop friendly faces, at least in public

Behind and inside of the outer facade we find the earthly content:

- destroyed relationships and no more communication
- conflict and violation and no willingness for reconciliation
- aimless biographies having lost all their roots
- outstanding debts and loans which can’t be repaid
- pain, disappointment, instability

What a gap between the appearance and the reality.

Most earthly lives hidden in precious jewel cases and vases.

We are carrying heavy stocks.

Wouldn’t it be an enormous relief to show ourselves as we are?

Wouldn’t we love to get an answer for all of our deep questions, which we don’t dare to ask?

Don’t we long for someone to open the door into life, who smiles at us, saying: “You are welcome! Take off your coat, please. And, please, do the same with the corset you are wearing underneath. Let me see what you’ve brought with you. Come in! The table is already laid. Surely, you must be hungry. And then, let’s talk...”

What a relief that would be.

Cleaning the air for myself: That's how I am. That's who I am.  
In dispute, broken, exhausted, deeply tired, with millions of questions.  
An earthen mug – full of cracks and defects. Breakable, human.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a famous German pastor wrote a poem, while he was imprisoned in 1944, a year before he was killed by Hitler in 1945:

Who am I? They often tell me  
I stepped from my cell's confinement  
calmly, cheerfully, firmly,  
like a squire from his country-house.  
Who am I? They often tell me  
I used to speak to my warders  
freely and friendly and clearly,  
as though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me  
I bore the days of misfortune  
equally, smilingly, proudly,  
like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?  
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?  
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,  
Struggling for breath, as though hands were  
compressing my throat,  
Yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,  
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,  
Who am I?.....

An earthen mug – full of cracks and defects. Breakable, human.

What a relief that would be.

Cleaning the air for myself: That's how I am. That's who I am.

How they stand in our way, these merciless images and demands,  
which we accept for ourselves, which other people expect of us and  
which we are conditioned to adhere to. We have to be convincing. We  
have to be successful. We have to be patient, friendly, smiling all the  
time. We have always to be in the spotlight. Our faith has to be a deep  
one and our hope has to be bright forever.  
However: That is not how and who we are. Not as long as we stay honest.

Some days it feels as though we are walking a tightrope. Some life-tasks will never be done. Some roads will always have risk. Earthen mugs. No golden vases or bright and glittering treasure chests. There are many eyes filled with tears behind the most noble curtains.

***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.***

What is it, what we have in our earthen pots?

Paul is going far back: God created a world, just because of his love. God is love and this love needs a counterpart, this love cannot be without another one. In the same way God has created light in us, has made us a new creation – for no other reason than for love, which can be seen in the face of Jesus.

In Jesus Christ the love of God finally can be seen – the love that agrees to share all of our suffering. The enlightenment and glory of God becomes visible in lowliness. Remember the second reading: Jesus does not allow his disciples to build huts on the mountain. That's what they would love to do. Let us stay here, on top, above all, far from everyday life, far from the world.

But Jesus resists and leads them back into reality. Straight back to a father with his epileptic child. That's the place where God's glory can be found. That's the place where God lives. In the midst of his suffering children. In intensive care. In the misery of Aleppo or Bagdad. In the hunger camps in Ethiopia. The presence of God in the midst of his suffering creation – that is God's glory in the visage of Christ.

That's the treasure of faith, the secret of believing. That's what we share, what we talk about, what we live in our lives. We are the people of light in the midst of darkness. We are a new creation in the midst of the old one. But...

We are not reflecting this light all the time. There is no red carpet, no public stage, no Olympic Games of Christian faith with medals for the most heroic believers.

The treasure of our faith shine like a light out of darkness, shine through the cracks of broken shells...power in weakness, frugality in grace.

Some years ago in Belfast in Northern Ireland a catholic teenager was shot by a protestant teenager. The best way to sow more hatred and violence. During the funeral the mother of the victim embraced the mother of the offender.

Pastor Robin Hutt, who has preached here in Peace Church several times and who was here for the bible study day last autumn, had been a witness of this encounter and shared it with us by saying: "What a power of faith!" What a glorious light, hidden in earthen mugs, hidden in the fragility of life and love.

The power of God faces hate and overcomes violence.

How the face of Christ is gleaming in this embrace.

We have to remember and to repeat it all the time. It is a truth which is challenged and doubted all the time.

We have this treasure in clay jars, in earthen mugs...

Will we be able to read between the lines and to discover the relief, which is offered by Paul?

Just accept, maybe with an easy-going bright smile: We are humans.

We are fallable. We are earthen mugs. Vulnerable, imperfect, fragments and that's ok.

Nothing else is requested but to accept ourselves as the person we are.

Nothing else is requested but to believe that we are God's precious creation, including all our limitation. We are appreciated, welcomed. No need to hide the earthen face of our life or to conceal and mask it.

And let us then avert our eyes from the fragile façade and discover: fragile as we are, we are the jars, home and hostel for God.

God invites us:

Say Yes to life in fragments. Say Yes to a life with which you don't identify yourself all the time. It is only God who is able to say: "I am, who I am." You don't have to say that. Love yourself because God loves you.

God invites us:

Say Yes to life in fragments. Say Yes even when there are many wishes, which are unmet, even when there is guilt and failure and mourning about a miss. Love yourself because God loves you.

God invites us:

Say Yes to life in fragments. Say Yes that you depend on others, that you depend on community. Most things in life only work in community. That is not a human error. That's how life is meant to be.

Love yourself because God loves you.

Our lives are fragments, full of cracks. That is how it will be at all times. *What we will be has not yet been revealed (1 John 3, 2).*

***For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness',***

The light of creation shines as a light of a new creation when we meet Jesus Christ, down at the bottom where we live and where we suffer. God's faithfulness is like fresh air and lets us experience:

*we are not crushed / we are not driven to despair / we are not forsaken / we are not destroyed.*

We are earthen jars, of course – but we are not empty, not worthless, but filled and fulfilled by God's faithfulness. By the light of his new creation.

It is a secret; it is a treasure in earthen jars. It's not for the red carpet, not for the public stage, not for the Olympic Games of Christian faith with medals for the most heroic believers.

But it is comfort in despair. It's the community of the church in misery. It's the power of prayer in sickness. It's the gesture of love in excessive demands. It's the encouragement of eternal life when we die, the life of Jesus in our bodies. Whenever we laugh or suffer, sing and lament, dance and bend, we find a treasure in the earthen jars, God within us.

*Who am I?* Dietrich Bonhoeffer asks in his poem. And he answers at the very end of his text: *Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine!*

As long as we know that, as long as we are able to join in confessing that, God's light is shining in us and through us, even if the jar is not made of gold and our life's path is not covered by a red carpet. Amen