

June 10, 2012 (Pentecost 2 B)

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

“CROSS now . . . GLORY later”

Let me address the working folks here for a moment: *if you could retire NOW, having more than enough money to meet all your needs for the rest of your life, having the freedom to do whatever, and go wherever you wanted . . . would you do it?* That sounds like a dream-come-true, doesn't it? We would LOVE that glorious freedom! Young people can't wait to be grown up and have their freedom / the middle-aged can't wait to have freedom from debts, duties, and responsibilities / those later in life yearn for the health, energy, and vigour of youth. Every human being longs for health, wealth, beauty and freedom.

But . . . when we look at **Jesus** – we find something very different, and quite unusual. He had it ALL. He had more glory, power, freedom, beauty and wealth than we can even begin to imagine. And – He willingly gave it all up! He set it all aside to become poor. He became a child, born in the filth of a lowly barn. He grew up and submitted to parents who actually did NOT know as much as their Son. He didn't make any money. He was essentially homeless. He would be hated, persecuted, beaten, spit upon, tortured, and nailed to a CROSS – a cross that He *willingly* came to die upon. We know **why** He did all this: it was for us. He came to bring life and salvation. It was the only way that He could get us sinful people into His glorious eternal home.

Isaiah and the other prophets spoke about how “the Christ” would suffer and die – but still, it was not what the Jewish people expected. They wanted a glorious King on the throne of Israel: a new global superpower. They wanted glory here – so did Jesus' own disciples. Instead, they saw their Lord and Saviour, their friend, their King – go to the cross and die the most shameful and horrible death. Then, He went back home to enjoy the glory of heaven.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection has now become the **pattern** for all who follow Him. Finally His disciples understood that too – it's **cross now . . . glory later**. Paul, in our text for today, describes the lives of the Apostles as they took up their crosses to follow in the pattern of their Saviour:

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

Already at that time, there were false teachers, and people known as “Super Apostles” who were out to get rich and famous – using religion as a tool to get what they wanted in this life. The genuine Apostles, on the other hand, followed in the footsteps and in the pattern of JESUS:

1. They wanted to glorify HIM. Jesus faced the cross for us, to atone for all our sin and guilt. It was all about HIM.
2. It's all about letting the **light** of the Gospel shine out into the world.
3. This **treasure** is contained in “jars of clay” – they were humble, imperfect, ordinary people. They were not “celebrities” – and they didn't want to be.
4. This ministry brought them **trouble** wherever they went. The devil was threatened by them, and caused them horrible grief wherever he could. But, God sustained them through it all, right up to the end.
5. They were **dying** – giving up their lives – to bring LIFE and salvation to others. It's all they wanted; it's all they really cared about.

That same pattern continues to this very day in God's Church. Oh sure, you can find all sorts of false teachers, televangelists and others using religion to get rich, to be famous, and to have power and

influence in this life. But, the **genuine church** of Christ follows the pattern of the Apostles, and Jesus Himself:

1. It's all about HIM – not us.
2. It's all about the glory and light of the pure Gospel message that brings salvation.
3. The people who proclaim this precious message are merely “jars of clay” – cracked, imperfect, ordinary people . . . nothing flashy.
4. These ordinary people face trouble, suffering, and persecution – because the unbelieving world is threatened by them.
5. Genuine servants of Christ are willing to give up their lives to bring eternal life and salvation to other people.

This is not **just** the pattern for wherever you find God's genuine church in action here – it's also the pattern for each genuine believer **individually**. We have discovered a *secret* that the world (apart from Christ) can never find! This secret changes our lives completely. Here it is: the GLORY – freedom / health / wealth / beauty / fulfillment / joy – that we all yearn for . . . can NOT be found in this world! So – **quit trying to find it HERE!** Let Christ radically transform your thinking, your dreams, your expectations, your goals, your LIFE. His pattern, His followers' pattern, is now the pattern for your life and mine:

1. It's not about YOU – it's about glorifying CHRIST. It's hard for us to grasp this, but – your life is not about YOU! It's about HIM!
2. The light of the Gospel – God's saving truth and loving goodness – can shine through you in every aspect of your life.
3. We are merely “jars of clay” – the real treasure is Christ. We are merely vessels to bring Him out into the world.
4. When we realize this and seek to show Him off – it will bring trouble into our lives! The unbelieving world is threatened by Christians who live their faith – expect it.
5. The clock is ticking. We are all dying. *What are we dying for?* Are we dying for meaningless junk and pleasure – like so many – or, are we dying to bring LIFE to others?

I'm not painting a depressing picture here! It's not CROSS now (we give, we sacrifice, we hurt, we're persecuted) . . . then we die a miserable death. It's *cross now . . . GLORY later!* The

freedom, wealth, beauty, happiness, fulfillment, joy . . . is HEAVEN. And, it's ours for eternity! It is a dream-come-true, and it's real – the resurrection of Jesus is proof of it. That hope, that future, that glorious home with our NAME on it . . . enables us to (just like Jesus, just like the Apostles) willingly and joyfully take up our crosses today and keep going. For, we know what the **secret** of life really is, what it all means, and where we are going.

Just remember that one little phrase: *cross now . . . glory later* – and follow Him home, where ALL your dreams will come true!