

Sermon for October 19, 2025 – The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

2 Corinthians 4:5-7

Theme: Christ through Us

- 1) Jesus is our Lord and Light.
- 2) We are His clay.

*<sup>5</sup>Indeed, we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup>For the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," is the same one who made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup>We hold this treasure in clay jars to show that its extraordinary power is from God and not from us.*

Our Synod's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a blessing from God. It gives us time to reflect on the past, thanking Him for His faithfulness, so we can confidently look forward to God fulfilling His promises in the future.

Unfortunately, the devil may also use the occasion to tempt us into thinking too highly of ourselves — to look at what “we” have done and take pride in “our” success. Alternatively, he may tempt us to despair, looking around and wondering why membership is smaller and ministry harder than before.

Temptations to both pride and despair share the same purpose: to take our eyes off of Christ and put them on ourselves. We look at attendance, giving, programs, and growth — and we start measuring spiritual success the way the world measures business success.

But the Church is not a business, and the Gospel is not a product. We are not spiritual salespeople. We are servants of Christ, carrying His treasure. We don't make disciples for Him — **He makes disciples through us.**

That's the truth the apostle Paul teaches in our sermon text for this morning, which we will consider under the theme “**Christ Through Us.**” 1) Jesus is our Lord and Light. 2) We are His clay.

Part One: Jesus is our Lord and Light.

Our sermon text is part of the apostle Paul's second letter to his congregation in Corinth. Certain false teachers, whom Paul sarcastically calls “super-apostles,” had gained influence there, impressing the people with their polished speeches, charisma, impressive credentials, and apparent success.<sup>i</sup> By comparison, Paul seemed weak — his speech plain, his appearance unimpressive, and his ministry marked by suffering.<sup>ii</sup>

Was the “super-apostles” worldly success proof of God's blessing? Absolutely not. The Lord desires faithfulness, not deception. He calls, gathers and enlightens people to faith through His

Word alone. Paul, therefore, refused to use manipulative tricks, psychological gimmicks, or fancy rhetoric in his ministry. Instead, he proclaimed God’s truth faithfully, clearly, and confidently:

*<sup>5</sup>Indeed, we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.*

Let us look at the details of this verse because every phrase is foundational to Gospel ministry. *Indeed, we do not preach ourselves* – our wisdom, stories, strategies, or feelings. We preach *Jesus Christ as Lord*.

The name Jesus means Saviour. He came to save His people from their sins. Christ means the Anointed One — chosen by God to be our Prophet, Priest, and King. As Prophet, He reveals God’s truth. As Priest, He offered Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins. As King, He rules His Church and protects His people.

When Paul says that he preached Jesus Christ as “Lord,” he is confessing something deeper than respect or admiration. He is confessing that Jesus is the true God, the eternal Son of the Father who came down to redeem us. And because Jesus is Lord, Paul calls himself a “servant” who acts only according to the will and command of Jesus, not the wishes and whims of men. Faithful ministry cannot promote itself; it must serve others by pointing them to the Saviour.

*<sup>6</sup>For the God who said, “Light will shine out of darkness,” is the same one who made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.*

The same LORD who spoke light into being over His dark creation, entered the darkness of our sin-cursed earth as the Light of the World<sup>iii</sup> – saving us through His sacrifice of Himself on the cross.

Yes, it was there that the light of God’s love broke the greatest darkness. The sinless Son of God was nailed to a cross, bearing every sin, failure, and gram of guilt that belonged to every person on this earth. The wrath we deserved was poured out on Him.

The Bible says that darkness covered the land as he hung on the cross.<sup>iv</sup> But in that darkness, God’s greatest act of love took place, proved by the declaration Jesus made before His final breath: “*It is finished.*”<sup>v</sup>

What was finished? All our sin, all our guilt, and all our punishment – gone! Why? Because Jesus’ death paid for all those things in full, proof of which was His empty tomb on Easter morning. The One who was crucified now lives. His resurrection is proof that His Father accepted His payment. Death has been defeated. The grave has lost its power. Because Jesus lives, we have forgiveness, peace, and everlasting life.

That is the heart of the Gospel — not what we do for God, but what God has done for us in Christ. That is the treasure Paul carried, and it is the same treasure God entrusts to us through faith.

*<sup>6</sup>For the God who said, “Light will shine out of darkness,” is the same one who made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.*

Yes, the God who created physical light by His Word also creates spiritual light through His Word. Before the LORD brought us to faith, our hearts were totally dark — dead in sin, selfishness and unbelief.<sup>vi</sup> But through the Gospel, God shone the Light of the World into our hearts - our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ — so we might believe and be saved.

Understand, therefore, that just as darkness cannot create light, we cannot bring ourselves to faith. Conversion is God’s miracle. He spoke light into our hearts the same way He spoke light into creation. Faith is entirely His gift.

That means the light and life we wish to share do not come from clever programs or marketing methods. It comes from God’s Word alone.

Our job, therefore, is neither to convince nor manipulate people into believing. Our job is merely to proclaim Christ – reflecting His light to others as the moon reflects the light of the sun.

Yes, think of the moon. It has no light of its own. When it turns toward the sun, it shines. When it turns away, it’s dark. We’re the same. When our hearts are turned from Christ, they dwell in spiritual darkness. When our hearts are focused on Jesus, they become so full of light that we can’t help but reflect it to others in our words and actions.

So then, instead of looking to the world for ideas on how to share the Gospel with others, just bask in the light of God’s saving love for you by using His Word and Sacraments to grow in faith. By doing that, you will naturally become His light bearer to the world – reflecting Christ’s love in your words and actions to the glory of His name.

## Part Two: We are His Clay.

Paul continues:

*<sup>7</sup>We hold this treasure in clay jars to show that its extraordinary power is from God and not from us.*

In the ancient world, clay jars were ordinary and fragile. They were used for everyday storage — cheap, breakable, and easily replaced. Paul says, “That’s what we are.”

We’re not flawless vessels made of gold or silver. We’re weak, limited, and prone to cracking under pressure. Yet God has placed His greatest treasure — the Gospel of His Son — inside of us. Why? So that everyone can see the power of His Gospel comes from Him, not from us.

God delights to use weak people to accomplish His strong purposes. He used Moses, who was slow in speech<sup>vii</sup>, Saul, who was timid<sup>viii</sup>, Peter, who denied Him, and Paul, who persecuted Him. Even more astonishing, He uses you and me — jars of clay — to carry His treasure to others.

When the world sees our weaknesses combined with our faith, they begin to understand that the power is not ours. It's God's.

Sometimes God even allows cracks to form in our jars — suffering, loss, disappointment — so that His light can shine through them more clearly. When we suffer but still trust Him, when we fail but still cling to His forgiveness, people see Christ at work. The treasure is revealed through the cracks.

As we celebrate 175 years of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, we can see this truth play out in our history. We are not a large or powerful synod. We've faced our share of difficulties, divisions, and challenges. But through all of it, God has preserved His Gospel among us.

He has used ordinary pastors, teachers, parents, and lay members — clay jars all — to carry His treasure to others. Missionaries have gone to distant lands. Congregations have been planted and sustained. Children have been taught the faith. The light of Christ has shone through countless acts of service and words of witness.

And through it all, one truth has remained the same: *the power is from God, not from us.*

The same is true in your congregation and personal life. God doesn't need you to be impressive; He calls you to be faithful. He doesn't ask you to change hearts; He asks you to share His Word. He doesn't want you to rely on your strength; He invites you to rely on His.

So what does this mean for us day by day?

- **First, be humble before Christ.** If anything good happens in our lives or churches, give the glory to God. We're just the jars. The treasure is His. Our pride robs Him of glory.
- **Second, be confident in Christ.** Don't be discouraged by weakness — yours, your congregation's or your synods. The Gospel is powerful even in weak, fragile hands. The Holy Spirit always works through His Word and Sacraments.
- **Third, be open for Christ.** Clay jars only show their treasure when opened. Let others see what God has done for you. Tell your story of forgiveness and hope in Christ. Let His love flow in your words and actions.

Everything in this world fades. Clay jars eventually crumble. Institutions rise and fall. Synods come and go. But the treasure of the Gospel never fades. The one thing that endures forever is the message that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

When all else is gone, that truth remains: *Christ died for our sins, rose for our justification, and lives to bring us home to Himself.* May this truth that has sustained our Synod for the past 175

years preserve us until Christ comes again in glory as He works through us to share His saving, forgiving love with the world. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:1-2; 11:5-6

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 10:10

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. John 8:12

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. Matthew 27:45

<sup>v</sup> John 19:30 EHV

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. Ephesians 2:1-10

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. Exodus 4:10-11

<sup>viii</sup> Cf. 1 Samuel 10:21-22