

B/H HC
15.2.15

2 Cor. 4:1-12
Mark 9:2-9

FINDING THE TREASURE

Have you ever tried one of those picture quizzes that asks you to recognise famous faces? I'm very bad at it, especially if they are pics taken from an unusual angle.

I'm bad at it because I'm not very interested in celebrities but some people have a genuine condition that makes them find it very difficult to recognise a face they've seen before. People with 'face blindness' can't rely on the clues most of us get from hair colour or nose shape or a smile to tell them who someone is.

Faces matter to us. I once read the journal of a friend of mine who had been away on a big trip for a long time. The last page mentioned the end of the trip '...and there were the 4 most beautiful faces in the world' – his wife and children.

If you can't recognise a face, something in our ability to relate to one another goes...you know those times when you see someone out of context and for a while you talk away but you're struggling to know who they are. When it clicks, it changes everything. You can suddenly interact very differently.

Both our readings tonight speak about recognising figures and faces - shining faces at that. The disciples see Moses, Elijah and a radiant Jesus. Paul talks about the light in our hearts that helps us to know the glory of God in the face of Christ. The light that shows us God's glory.

It's a really important light. For Paul, there is no visible Jesus standing in front of him. He only got that on the Damascus road. But it's as if he

carries the light of that face with him. He's looked into Jesus' face, as it were, and that's all he needs. He sees God's glory, he sees the character of God, he can keep the relationship going. 'the most beautiful face in the world. It isn't just about looks. It's everything about the person being summed up in their face and for Paul it's like a light in his heart. You look at someone you know and all that you know about the is given a reminder in their face.

But Paul is looking back as well. When Moses met God on Mount Sinai, he came down the mountain with a face so radiant that people couldn't bear to look at him. He had to veil his face. God's reflected glory was too much for them. Each time Moses met God he would get a 'top-up' of radiance and have to cover his face when he came back!

Now people can have that light in their hearts through their belief in God's word, his gospel. Some won't get it. It will be as if they're looking through a veil. Others will have that light of hope and direction and trust in their hearts. God's glory, in the face of Christ. The more we look at Jesus Christ and see what he's like, the more we come to reflect his light. The more we see what he's like, the more of that light is in our hearts.

When the light of Christ is there, there can be real hope for the future. If you're hard pressed you don't have to be crushed, says Paul; if you're perplexed, bewildered, you don't have to be in despair. You've still got that light in your hearts. Keep on looking into the face of Christ, the word of God, the gospel and remember what that face says about God.

But Paul has something else to say about this light, this treasure as he calls it. He says it's in jars of clay.

When I went to Crete I visited a village known as the Potters' village because there are dozens of potters there. There were vast numbers of clay pots! All shapes and sizes.....Most of us know that even when they've been fired and glazed, clay pots can shatter easily. You only need

to see the effect of a frost on your terracotta plant pot to know how fragile clay can be.

It's a reminder of how fragile we are as human beings and that's important for two reasons. Firstly, according to Paul, it means we are forced to realise that the treasure we've got is like an all-surpassing power that's from God, not ourselves. No room for pride.

*I recently read the poem 'Ozymandias' by Shelley. The traveller has told a story of a statue that is destroyed **'two vast and trunkless legs of stone in the desert....near them on the sand, half sunk, a shattered visage lies',** It has a **'frown, a wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command'** meant to represent the passions of the earthly ruler that the statue was meant to represent. **And on the pedestal these words appear: my name is ozymandias, king of kings. Look on my works, ye mighty and despair!'** But when the traveller looked, **'Nothing beside remains'** there's a **'colossal wreck'** but then just **level sands that stretch far away.***

The poem is a stern warning to those who want to make themselves great. The statue was destroyed and everything else with it. They were 'feet of clay' . We need to beware of getting above ourselves – it's the heart of the human problem. We have a treasure but it's in clay vessels to show that the 'all-surpassing power is from God and not from ourselves'.

But secondly, knowing we're no more than fragile clay vessels gives us a demonstration of how we can hold the light of Christ however fragile we may be. You're hard-pressed? The light can still shine. You're persecuted? You're not abandoned. The light can still shine. A terracotta oil lamp has holes around the edges to let the light through. The cracks let the light shine through.

'Therefore we do not lose heart' says Paul.

The disciples had their glimpse of Jesus, radiant, shining and then they had to face the normalities, troubles and conflicts of everyday life again.

The Corinthians knew the gospel of hope and resurrection and they could carry the light of that gospel that came in the face of Christ.

We are the same. People who need to remember that it's God's power, not ours, that we rely on. People who are fragile but who have cracks that let the light through; people who just have to keep looking on the face of Christ so that we can recognise his goodness once again.