

Sunday, February 15, 2015

Courageous Conversations: Exalting Christ in the midst of our Conversation

2 Kings 2: 1-12; Psalm 50:1-6; 2 *Corinthians* 4: 3-12; Mark 9: 2-9

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Clay jars are an interesting metaphor for who we are.

We are depicted by Paul as earthen pots,  
- common everyday pots.

We are meant for common everyday-type uses

- for holding flour to bake bread,
- for holding olive oil for cooking and baking,
- for being used as a cooking pot to make the evening meal.

And as we are used, we get bumped and chipped, and perhaps become even “cracked pots,”  
- not “crack pots” but “cracked pots.”

If you were to pour liquid into us, we no longer are able to hold in what we are to hold in  
– we leak!

But leaking may be a good thing  
– depends on what we are “leaking.”

If we are vessels in whom Christ resides,  
- it might be a good thing to “leak Christ”  
- so that his presence is visible in us and through us,  
And that in leaking him, we reveal the presence of God in the world.

And though we think we may become useless as vessels  
– maybe we realize we are finally in a place where the “all-surpassing power [of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ for the restoration of the world], that this surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

We work hard at being more than clay jars in our lives  
- we work hard at overcoming our weaknesses,  
- we try be more than common pots,  
- we try to patch the “chips” and “cracks” in our lives by seeing professionals  
And we don’t do all that bad of a job of becoming more than we are.

Now, I am not saying, don’t try to improve yourself, get healthier, get stronger, etc.  
– metaphors are not meant to be all encompassing  
– rather they speak to one thing in particular.

What I am desiring for us to notice is that God would really love to be revealed in and through our lives;

God's desires for this God's power in us through the Spirit to be revealed in and through us in all we are and do.

I don't remember where I read this, but an author expressed that if we weren't cracked pots,  
- we would never be vessels through whom the light of Christ, and the power of the Spirit would shine

– our relationship with Christ and the power of the Spirit would remain internal to us

But in being imperfect, chipped and cracked pots

- Christ is able to be manifest through our lives;
- Christ is visible in us.

Meaning

- that when we act for justice,
- when we offer grace and mercy,
- when we act for peace

It is not merely we who people see

- people see Christ set free in us,
- flowing through us,
- revealed in us,
- shining forth from our lives.

So, that the people we are called to engage and interact with

- discover that the power of the Gospel which is displayed in our lives
- comes not from us
- is not something we have created
- but it comes from God who is active and alive in us.

In this sense, it is good we are imperfect clay pots

- we are more apt to reveal the presence of God more through our brokenness than our perfection
- we become more complete, **because Christ is in us.**

**This understanding has bearing on how we engage in courageous conversations with one another.**

If courageous conversations were just about getting our viewpoints across to the other

- thinking it is our responsibility to express what we believe and convince others
- to make a case for the “rightness” of our position
- even our understanding of Scripture
- then our conversations may not get anywhere.

Our conversations become more about politics than anything else.

But we are called to be a different kind of people  
– a people shaped by the Gospel.

**But what if we engaged in courageous dialogue with a different spirit?**

– a spirit in which, as Paul declares of having a similar attitude as that of Christ, in which we look not just to our own interests, but the interest of the other (Php 2).

What if we realized that we are all chipped and cracked, we are common and imperfect – and that our goal is not to see how incomplete we are

– but to strain to see Christ being revealed in and through each of our lives  
– the Spirit of Christ, who has taken up residence within us (i.e., our bodies, lives being the Temple of the Holy Spirit).

**In so doing, might not our conversation take on a different demeanor?**

We are not just engaging one another

– rather, we are seeking to engage Jesus who is alive in one another  
– and share Christ who is alive in us.

Now this does not call us to become dis-integrated (i.e., as if Christ and we are two different persons within us),

- rather we grow into becoming fully integrated as human beings in restored relationship with God
- because Christ has taken on our life and we have taken on his life.

In our brokenness

– we are held together by Christ Jesus.

I realize I am still learning to do this

– I think most of us are  
– it takes our whole lives to learn this.

But in the midst of our engaging in courageous conversations

– which most congregations may want to shy or run away from  
– our engaging such conversations brings us face to face with our own understanding of ourselves as clay jars, common pots  
– even chipped and cracked

– **through which we are given the privilege to see the Spirit at work in us, and Christ alive in us.**

If we regarded each other in this way?

**How might our conversations go?**

**How might our conversations change?**

When we seek to have conversations in such a manner  
– we discover that we are not seeking to exalt ourselves  
– we are seeking to exalt Christ  
– who is in us and among us.

**May you and I give attention**

– to not just “my” viewpoints  
– or only to one another’s viewpoints;  
– but may we first catch a glimpse of Jesus  
– and be drawn to see Christ Jesus shining in us and through us  
– as we engage one another.