

## Treasure in Jars of Clay: The Jars are Frugal; the Treasure is Lavishly Expensive

Mark 6:7-13 (NIV)

<sup>7</sup> Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits. <sup>8</sup> These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. <sup>9</sup> Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. <sup>10</sup> Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. <sup>11</sup> And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." <sup>12</sup> They went out and preached that people should repent. <sup>13</sup> They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

A jar of clay is fragile, functional, and also frugal. They're cheap. They don't look like much because they don't cost much. Currently, clay costs \$16 a ton. We are jars of clay called to share what we have, but do we have what it takes to share God with others?

Last week in our Gospel reading, we heard that Jesus was rejected in his hometown pretty much based on their familiarity with them. They had known him growing up, knew his family. And so they wouldn't believe that he was the Christ, the Savior of the world. But this did not stop Jesus. Instead of giving up functioning as a jar of clay, he went around teaching from village to village. He even increased the amount of preaching and teaching. "Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits." (verse 7) Jesus now turned his disciples, his learners, into apostles, the ones sent out to share with others the unbreakable treasure of what God has done for us, albeit in somewhat of a frugal way.

The Twelve didn't look like much. They were a bunch of blue-collar fishermen along with a former tax-collector who would have been a social pariah, a political activist (maybe what we call a SJW today), and others who we don't really know about. They were not the respected rabbis or experts in the Word of God. They didn't have their masters in theology or priestly training. They were everyday men, kind of picked up and utilized on the cheap.

This ragtag group of average people were given these instructions by Jesus as they went out two by two: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt." (verses 8-9) Be frugal. Take what you have, nothing extra. Don't plan for the worst or worry about your daily needs. Don't even bring along a bagged lunch or snacks. Don't trade up in accommodations on your frugal mission trip. "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town." (verse 10) But also know that not everyone will welcome your message of me. "And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." (verse 11) These jars of clay looked pretty frugal, pretty cheap, as they didn't have hardly any resources with them as they went out to preach God to others.

What do we look like when we are present among people and function as a jar of clay sharing with them our unbreakable treasure of God? Do we have the best resources, everything we need for every situation, or do we look pretty frugal, pretty cheap, maybe feeling ill equipped? Two weeks ago when we talked about being fragile jars of clay, one of the ways that we feel fragile in sharing our God with others is that we think that we don't know enough, that we might say something wrong, that the people we talk to will ask questions that we don't have the answer to. Feeling fragile, we decide that this work is left up to someone else with more experience with more education, more training, more resources. We get comfortable pushing off the mission from God to share him with others as if it doesn't apply to us, but only for those who are trained to do so, those who have the resources.

We are jars of clay, a pretty cheap, inexpensive household item. We don't have millions of dollars or infinite resources to share the Good News of what God has done for other people. We have what we have and we try to make good use of it. We're frugal.

At the same time, though, what do we have to give? Although we are frugal jars of clay, we have treasure that is lavishly expensive. Do we realize that and portray it as it actually is? I think many of us feel pretty good to say that Jesus' gift of forgiveness and eternal life in heaven is free. God's grace is free. We offer this "free" gift to others, thinking that they would be ridiculous not to take it. I mean, it is free, and it's everything. It's no cost to you. But what do people think when they hear the word "free"?

What do you think when someone calls you up on the telephone and tells you that they are going to give you a free night's stay in a hotel? My first thought is that "It's a scam," or "What's the catch? This is going to cost me something, but what?" The other synonymous thought hearing the word "free" is "cheap." It's free because it cost that person next to nothing to obtain it. So, they can give it away. It'll probably break easily. This isn't a prized possession. Anything free isn't worth having.

And so there is an immediate skepticism with people in our community when we tell them that God and his gifts to us are “free.” What’s the catch? Is it really free? Is it cheap? Is it junk? As we share our God as frugal jars of clay, let’s remember just how expensive God’s gift of perfection to us and for us actually is.

We often shorthand God’s gift of perfection to us to be his death on the cross. And this is certainly a big part of it. Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, that his blood makes atonement not just for one life, but for all human lives. How expensive is that? How much does that cost? Going by today’s population, Jesus personally paid the price of life for 7 billion people, 7 billion times over. It’s estimated that 107 billion people have lived thus far in human history. This means Jesus, as God, paid the price of 107 billion people’s lives and sins. He paid for every single one of those sins for all 107 billion people. I can’t even keep track of how many sins, mistakes, and imperfections I have in a day, let alone a lifetime. Jesus paid the price not just for me, but for every single one of them.

Then there’s the cost to God the Father. I’ve not lost a child to death, but I know that some of you have. Some of you have buried a child. That cost to you often feels unbearable. It stays with you forever. Now remember that God the Father willingly paid the price to give up his Son to death. He paid that cost so that you could have him and his perfection.

Going back to God the Son, to Jesus. It’s not enough to pay the price to wipe our sinful slate clean with his death. He also had to pay the price to fill every single person with his perfection, a life lived with no mistakes, no imperfections, no sin, not even one. This means that from the moment of his conception to the time of his death, he had to live in constant perfection. Knowing that he lived on earth 33 years under God’s law in order to keep it for us, this means that Jesus spent more than 12,000 days or 290,000 hours or 17 million minutes or 1 billion seconds keeping every single one of God’s commands and laws for you and me, and this is for all 107 billion people and counting.

Now think about the cost to God the Holy Spirit. He’s the one who uses this message of God the Father giving his Son for us, of Jesus’ perfect life lived for us in our place and his life given over to death to wipe away every single one of our sins in order to bring people to faith, to put that belief in their hearts so that we are covered with Jesus’ perfection right now. How many conversations, how many sermons, how many Bible readings, how many hours, how many days, how many years did he work on your heart to believe this? And he’s working on you still right now. God as our always functioning treasure never stops working to make sure that his Word never returns empty, but that we are saved and clothed with perfection.

God chose to pay these costs in time, in lives, in actions. He also chose to never demand repayment from anyone, even when they reject it. This is what you cost to God. This is how valuable you are to him because he paid the price. This is our lavishly expensive treasure inside our cheap, frugal jars of clay, a cost that is incalculable.

You have this, and you know this. This lavishly expensive treasure is your resource and the same resource the apostles had as they functioned as jars of clay going two by two even with their so very limited resources. “They went out and preached that people should repent.” (verse 12) We don’t need a masters in theology or priestly training to share our lavishly expensive treasure with others. You already know what it cost God for you to have the forgiveness of sins and complete perfection. He paid the price, and it was beyond anything we could ever hope to afford. You have the stories of God’s love paid for you out of his choice. There are no qualifiers, no asterisks, no loan repayments to have this treasure. God spent this on you and me. This is the lavishly expensive treasure that we jars of clay share with others.

Like the disciples, we don’t actually need more resources to function. We are frugal jars of clay using what we already have - this lavishly expensive treasure - to share with others that richness so that they can have it too. Amen.