

Ears Tingling and Treasure in Clay Jars

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist, June 2nd, 2024 - 1 Samuel 3:1-11 & 2 Cor 4:5-12)

Samuel is told he would hear something from God that would make all who hear that message ears tingle.

Ears tingling, I wonder what that phrase means. Does it mean that whatever we hear will get our immediate attention? Will we hear something intriguing? Will it be something out of the ordinary? Will it spur us on to action? Will it lead us to sharing whatever the news is.

Paul has a slightly different way of talking about a message that will be ear tingling, intriguing, out of the ordinary, that will spur us on to action and sharing that message. Paul speaks about treasure in clay jars. Treasure in clay pots. Treasure in earthenware vessels.

In ancient times, in Jesus' time and in many places in the world clay jars are used. They were used for many purposes in daily life. They held water and oil. They contained flour or seeds. They were used for cooking. Maybe they contained oil lamps to shed light.

Sometimes they contained valuable documents and sometimes they contained coins, but their main purpose was more ordinary, and they were used every day, and had a functional purpose. They were common and often would break easily, and in some senses only held its contents for a short time.

Now we live in a world where we don't really use clay jars much anymore. We tend to use plastic bottles or glass jars to put things in. I remember a time when pottery was all the go – we had pottery or earthenware mugs, crockery sets and casserole dishes. I think I still have a clay or pottery dip tray and quiche dish. Still today they are used to cook in – think North African tagines. We sometimes have clay pots in the garden.

When I think about all we have used clay for it seems to me that all of its contents are to be shared – food, drink, plants.

We are like clay jars, says Paul. Ordinary, common in fact, functional, used to hold something necessary for life. And fragile, easily broken.

The purpose of such clay jars is to hold treasure. The contents of the clay jar according to Paul is more significant than the jar itself. So, what is the treasure to which he refers. The treasure of course is the gospel, the message of God's love for the world revealed in Jesus. Such a message is our hope and strength and enables us to get through the tough times.

As we continue to reflect together, I would like you all to take a piece of clay and to make a pinch pot.

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Take the clay and form it into a ball. Now press your thumb into the middle of it. Continue to gently pinch the walls between your thumb and finger forming the walls or sides. Try and do it evenly and don't make it too thin.

As you look around at what others are making, you will notice that none of them are the same, they are all different, different shapes, sizes – unique. They might look a bit strange. They might look fragile, they may even have some cracks.

Let's think again about what Paul might mean by the believers being like clay jars. They have been formed by someone, in this case God, God the artisan has formed each jar lovingly, has taken the time to form each jar and every jar is different but equally beautiful in the maker's sight. That is what we are, formed lovingly by God into many different shapes and sizes, unique but all loved equally and will be used by God.

All these jars contain treasure, and that treasure is the good news, the gospel, the message of God's love for the world.

A message of love. A message of forgiveness. A message of inclusion. A message of welcome. A message of reconciliation. A message of unity. A message of kindness. A message of acceptance. A message of peace.

It is truly amazing that God would put in us (clay jars) his most special message, the message that would make ears tingle. The jars might be less than perfect and even a bit fragile and cracked but they contain the hope that God offers us, that we are loved. It is that love that will get us through whatever situation we find ourselves in.

Clay jars were only temporary holders of contents, the flour was to be used, the oil poured out. The treasure we have within us is not to be withheld, we cannot keep it to ourselves, it is the hope on which we draw but it must be shared.

Our challenge is to find ways to let that which is contained in the clay jar to flow out, to be used. How can we pour out the treasure we have for the good of others? How might we help each other pour out that treasure?

Are we willing to be broken so the treasure spills out? Can we see the message of God's love is only to be held lightly or temporarily by us and poured out for others, shared with others, used to build others up? Can we see ourselves as a vessel that holds the light so that darkness might be cast out?

As the church we might be small, we might be fragile, even a bit broken, we might feel like everything is pressing in on us, but we have within us a great treasure, the love of God which is our hope and hope for the whole world.

We are jars of clay – unique yet ordinary, formed by God, different from another, a bit cracked and wonky but within us all we have the greatest treasure, the love of God and that love cannot stay within the jar, it must be poured out for others.