

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
September 25, 2022  
In an Earthenware Jar



## **SAVING OUR FAITH**

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**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

Come to this place and time of promise.

**We are becoming the house of hope,  
the field of sunflowers, the vineyard of great caring.**

Come to a shared commitment  
to abundance possible for all people.

**We are an earthenware jar,  
to keep safe the tomorrow of children.**

**Our security question is – the word of God,  
and our password is love.**

**\*INVOCATION:**

God, we give you thanks that you make us  
redeemers, not just receivers of redemption. You  
bring us among friends and then ask for each one of  
our signatures to change your world. We hold the  
earthenware jar you call the church and fill it with all  
your promises. Amen.

**\*PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

**God, I have defaulted to un-hope in my life  
and I have encouraged un-hoping in others.**

**I have criticized plans before hearing them out  
and I have turned to family, church,  
friends, colleagues with my face painted,  
“we’ve tried that before and it didn’t work.”**

**Together we have laughed at new ideas and  
circulated only bad news.**

**Plant your promises deep in the field of our lives,  
and forgive us our presuming to define your future.  
Amen.**

**\*WORDS OF GRACE:**

God wipes pessimism from the open heart and sends others to affirm in us even the most fragile possibilities of the future. We are forgiven.

**FIRST TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE:**

**Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15**

**Summarized in the message**

**EPISTLE LESSON: 1 Timothy 6:6-19**

(Thoughts from Paul)

<sup>6</sup>Actually, godliness is a great source of profit when it is combined with being happy with what you already have. <sup>7</sup>We didn't bring anything into the world and so we can't take anything out of it: <sup>8</sup>we'll be happy with food and clothing. <sup>9</sup>But people who are trying to get rich fall into temptation. They are trapped by many stupid and harmful passions that plunge people into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup>The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some have wandered away from the faith and have impaled themselves with a lot of pain because they made money their goal.

<sup>11</sup>But as for you, man of God, run away from all these things. Instead, pursue righteousness, holy living, faithfulness, love, endurance, and gentleness. <sup>12</sup>Compete in the good fight of faith. Grab hold of eternal life—you were called to it, and you made a good confession of it in the presence of many witnesses. <sup>13</sup>I command you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and Christ Jesus, who made the good confession when testifying before Pontius Pilate. <sup>14</sup>Obey this order without fault or failure until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup>The timing of this appearance is revealed by God alone, who is the blessed and only master, the King of kings and Lord of lords. <sup>16</sup>He alone has immortality and lives in light that no one can come near. No human being has ever seen or is able to see him. Honor and eternal power belong to him. Amen.

**Wealth of good works**

<sup>17</sup>Tell people who are rich at this time not to become egotistical and not to place their hope on their finances, which are uncertain. Instead, they need to hope in God, who richly provides everything for our enjoyment. <sup>18</sup>Tell them to do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others. <sup>19</sup>When they do these things, they will save a treasure for themselves that is a good

foundation for the future. That way they can take hold of what is truly life.

**\*GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 16:19-31**

<sup>19</sup> “There was a certain rich man who clothed himself in purple and fine linen, and who feasted luxuriously every day. <sup>20</sup> At his gate lay a certain poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. <sup>21</sup> Lazarus longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table. Instead, dogs would come and lick his sores.

<sup>22</sup> “The poor man died and was carried by angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> While being tormented in the place of the dead, he looked up and saw Abraham at a distance with Lazarus at his side. <sup>24</sup> He shouted, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I’m suffering in this flame.’ <sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received good things, whereas Lazarus received terrible things. Now Lazarus is being comforted and you are in great pain. <sup>26</sup> Moreover, a great crevasse has been fixed between us and you. Those who wish to cross over from here to you cannot. Neither can anyone cross from there to us.’

<sup>27</sup> “The rich man said, ‘Then I beg you, Father, send Lazarus to my father’s house. <sup>28</sup> I have five brothers. He needs to warn them so that they don’t come to this place of agony.’ <sup>29</sup> Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets. They must listen to them.’ <sup>30</sup> The rich man said, ‘No, Father Abraham! But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will change their hearts and lives.’ <sup>31</sup> Abraham said, ‘If they don’t listen to Moses and the Prophets, then neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.’”

**\*RESPONSE:** This is the word of God. It is true and can be trusted. **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**MESSAGE: “Whose words guide your life; how do you preserve these words?”**

For the last six weeks or so, we have been reading about Jeremiah who was a prophet right before the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. His message had been an almost unrelenting announcement of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem. Now that his dire prophecies are on the verge of being fulfilled in the final siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Babylon, Jeremiah comes forth with an almost puzzling proclamation of good news.

At this time Jeremiah is confined in the court of the guard, you might say house-arrest. Apparently because his persistent announcements of the city's fall and the exile of the rightful king, was considered by the authorities to be destroying the morale of the people.

By means of a simple real estate transaction becomes a message from God. Jeremiah receives a visitor, the son of his uncle, who tells Jeremiah to buy his field of land at Anathoth. Jeremiah does and this transaction becomes a sign of hope for the people. The message from God is to build houses and fields and vineyards on this land again. This is a sign of a better future for the people.

The scripture text goes on to explain the details of the transaction in meticulous and technical detail. All the documents are to be put in earthen jars and sealed for prosperity. A copy of the documents are kept out to ensure against anyone altering the contract and could resolve any disputes.

Thus, you have earthen jars on the cover of your bulletin. They remind me about the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls that were also found in jars like this. Evidently the jars did a good job of protecting our precious scriptures for many, many years.

Now we come to our Gospel reading. The part that caught my eye were the last five verses. This is

another parable from Jesus. The rich man had been sent to the place of the dead when he died and was being tormented. He is begging Abraham for mercy.

<sup>27</sup> "The rich man said, 'Then I beg you, Father, send Lazarus to my father's house. <sup>28</sup> I have five brothers. He needs to warn them so that they don't come to this place of agony.' <sup>29</sup> Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets. They must listen to them.' <sup>30</sup> The rich man said, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will change their hearts and lives.' <sup>31</sup> Abraham said, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the Prophets, then neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'"

These last five verses got me to think about myself. Where and how do I receive God's message? Who do I listen to in order to guide my life? Who do I believe? Does someone have to rise from the dead to get my attention? Reading scripture is good but sometimes I don't understand it. So, I read commentaries from authors I trust. When I say "trust" I mean there are many authors on the shelves of book stores. How do I weed out the ones with "unhelpful" intentions? What is their purpose for writing the book? If the author is arrogant (God told

me to write this book and make lots of money) or those (“promising prosperity” if I just send them \$100). I try to do research on authors and look at their education, background, reputation, and how they live out their ministry. Action speaks louder than words. Do the author’s words make sense to me?

What am I looking for? I’m looking for LOVE; I’m looking for the man we read about in the Gospels; the compassionate man, who heals the wounded, feeds the hungry, comforts those who are grieving or dying, who turns no one away, who eats with sinners and the poor and destitute. That man’s words are precious to me. That man Jesus Christ. I might want to put them in earthen jars to preserve them, but I don’t think that’s what Jesus wants us to do. Jesus wants us to believe the good news and live as though the words make a difference in my life. Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:** Beginning with silent personal prayers.

Our wise and compassionate God. We come to you with many questions and many doubts. How do we know your true words of life for us? Speaker of all languages, help us to heed the law of Moses that we may live morally, the call of the prophets that we may seek justice for all, the Good News of the risen

Christ that eternal life may be the treasure that all receive through trust in your Word.

Hear our prayers for your whole church, in congregations, denomination, and councils of churches, national and international. Bless all who have been called to be leaders in your church on earth that they may serve you humbly. Save us from pride in what we have done when there is so much more that we could do. As we are strengthened by the aid of the Spirit when we are working your will, so may we be repentant when corrected by the Spirit for inaction or disobedience.

Speak to your people through whom you will speak, not only through the ordained leadership but through any to whom you have given insight so that speaking or writing or acting they may call the church to do what is pleasing to you in the service of our neighbors.

Hear us, gracious God, for all the sick and ailing, for the maimed and cripples, for those with mental illness mine that they may have whatever healing ministries they require. Send aid to weary parents and to those who are shut-in, and visitors to those who are confined in prisons or locked wards.

Hear our prayers for family and friends who are sick and in critical health and give us reason to rejoice

in their healing or when they achieve wholeness. We remember all those on our prayer lists.

Thank you for sending us your son who taught us how to pray for others.

**THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

**INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:**

We are invited to offer resources, time, abilities, compassion, in a tangible expression of our hope for the future for ourselves, this community of faith and many others near and far away. [include directions for receiving in the particular church. Be generous, my friends, with your trust in the future.

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION:**

**God, we have received hope; we give you time. We have received hope; we give one another the church. We have received hope; we offer these gifts that they may become the change or simply the**

**promise of change among those who need this clear image that they are not abandoned. Amen**

**\*BENEDICTION:**

May you be as blessed as Jeremiah – with a word-of-God whisper when you are waiting, a glimpse of freedom when you are confined, a friend to show you the way forward, an earthenware jar of God's love in which your signature is precious.

**PRAYER LIST:**