

Weekend of the Passion of Our Lord (RCL/C): "Crackpots and Cracked Pots"
Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 22:14-23:56
April 9-10, 2022
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

There's a story about a man who lived long ago and far away. He had a garden that he watered with wooden buckets placed on each end of a long pole he carried on his shoulders. Back and forth from stream to garden he'd go. The one bucket was in good shape and nicely held all the water scooped into it from the stream. The other had cracks and leaked a lot along the way. This made the split bucket feel sad and useless: "I can't even perform the humble job I was made for!" He asked the water bearer, "Why don't you just throw me out and replace me??" The man answered, "Look at the path we follow from the stream. What do you notice?" The bucket said, "Well, there are flowers, but only on one side of the path." "Yes," said the gardener, "the flowers flourish because you water them as we walk along. You're empty by the time we arrive at the garden, but that's because you've watered another garden along the way."

Here's a verse by Leonard Cohen in his song *Anthem* that holds similar wisdom:

Ring the bells that still can ring.
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack, a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.

This Passion story that St. Luke wrote definitely confirms that there's a crack in everything.

Jesus sees all the cracks clearly, feels them intently:

- He predicts the betrayal by Judas, one of the Twelve, not a disgruntled outsider but a friend in the innermost circle.
- He witnesses the argument among His friends about who is the greatest, the most important, the Grand Poohbah, the favorite of all, a heated debate they're having despite the lesson their Master has **tried** to teach them: "...the **least** among all of you is the **greatest**" (Luke 9:48c, NRSV).
- Jesus predicts Peter will swear he doesn't know Him 3 times before the sun even rises.

- Jesus rises from prayer that was so anguished He was sweating drops of blood, and catches His friends nodding off instead of: *“Pray[ing] that [they might] not come into the time of trial”* (Luke 22:40c). Maybe the fact that they were snoozing instead of praying is why they **did** come into the time of trial and failed so miserably.
- More cracks in humanity are evident as the religious leaders approach with the Temple guard, Judas in the forefront: *“Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?”* (Luke 22:48b)
- One of the disciples thinks that physical violence will protect the Master, so he draws blood by slicing off the ear of the high priest’s slave. Jesus turns away from everything else that’s going on to mend the damage. (It’s only St. Luke who reports this and it’s one of the reasons some say that he was a physician with special interest in disease, injury, healing.)
- Although our Lord is led **inside** the high priest’s house, He’s aware that Peter is denying him **outside** in the courtyard. By the third denial Jesus has been hauled outside again and the rooster has crowed. St. Luke is the only one who paints the following heart-wrenching scene:
 - *The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.* (Luke 22:61-62)

Is it too much of a stretch to say that Jesus must have felt like crying, too? It’s a sorry showing for everybody **but** Jesus. And that’s the point. We’re **all** in need of a Savior. There’s the tragedy of the story: lack of recognition on the part of some that our Lord **is** the Savior, and lack of awareness that they **need** one. Our Lord Jesus is in the midst of this mess of humanity, He’s right in there with all the crackpots and with all of us cracked pots. He **cleans up** the mess by immersing Himself **in** the mess. He doesn’t arrive in a spiritual hazmat suit to protect Himself from our spiritual contagion. He allows Himself literally to be stripped of His clothes, whipped to the bone, spat upon, ridiculed, and nailed to the cross, an instrument of capital punishment for the most despicable of all outlaws. We know our Lord experienced pain of all kinds: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. During His Passion the Lord may have felt like the author of Psalm 31 (v. 12b): *“I am as useless as a broken pot.”* This weekend’s passage from Philippians puts it best of all:

*...[he] emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave...
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death –*

even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:7-8)

Our Lord Jesus saves us, not by maximizing Himself, but by minimizing Himself.

Remember that sign over His head as He was hanging on the cross, the sign that stated His crime and labeled Him King of the Jews, meant sarcastically but actually the truth? Sometimes a sign like that was hung around the neck of the crucified. Often on the way to the crucifixion site someone else carried the placard ahead of the criminal to let everyone know what awful thing he had done to deserve such a fate. In other words, **“Don’t be like him!** Don’t do what he did! Just look where it’s gotten him! Avoid his fate, at all costs!”

Yet as followers of Jesus Christ, as Christians, we **are** to be like Him, at all costs! At the Last Supper, in the midst of the discussion about who is the greatest, He stops the conversation and points out, *“I am among you as one who serves”* (Luke 22:27c). He’s already made it clear that **they, we**, are also to be in the world as those who serve. On the heels of announcing that a member of their tightknit little circle will betray Him, He confers on them a kingdom, *“so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom”* (Luke 22:30a). Likewise, we who are guilty of our own betrayals and denials, we who are guilty of infighting and sometimes jockeying for positions of influence, power, privilege, **we** are welcomed to eat and drink at the Lord’s Table even now, enjoying a nibble and sip of glory, recognizing it as the foretaste of the feast to come.

Holy Week is a perfect time to confess once again that we **create** a mess and that we often **are** a mess and that we’re sorry for **the mess we make** of our own lives and of others’ lives and of the world. Yes, we’re often clueless, and when we realize the hurt we’ve inadvertently caused we are **so** grateful for our Lord’s prayer from the cross, valid for all time: *“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34b). But sometimes we’re quite aware of the selfish and faithless choices we are making, and when we repent and rue those failures in love

after the fact, we are comforted, heartened, kept from despair and filled with hope by our faith that His blood was “shed for [us] and for all people for the forgiveness of sins.” Maundy Thursday worship will include the laying on of hands for individual absolution of our sins for those who desire it.

Remember what Jesus said to Peter that fateful night? *“I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers”* (Luke 22:32). That’s our commission, too: once we have turned back to our Lord’s love and light, once we’ve left the wide path that leads to destruction and accessed the narrow path that leads to life, we too, are to strengthen our brothers and sisters.

Ring the bells that still can ring.
 Forget your perfect offering.
 There is a crack, a crack in everything.
 That’s how the light gets in.

Sometimes we act like crackpots and all of us **are** cracked pots, damaged and imperfect in various ways, but we are also infinitely loved and valuable, and the Lord uses our cracks for His own purposes. As St. Paul says in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 4:7), woven into the hymn *Earthen Vessels* by the St. Louis Jesuits:

We hold a treasure, not made of gold,
 In earthen vessels wealth untold.
 One treasure only, the Lord, the Christ,
 In earthen vessels.

Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

