

June 3, 2018 "What is Essential?" II Corinthians 4:5-12

Among the ordinary people of this world Helen reigned supreme: quiet, unassuming and even timid. There was nothing about her physical appearance or personality or worldly achievements that would mark her as noteworthy or recognizable. Her eight years of public education in Northern Minnesota definitely was not significant on a resume, if she ever created one, which she did not. Sickness and near blindness stalked her life until the day she died on an operating table with only her husband in the waiting room.

And yet I saw and experienced the living God in her daily life and in her commitment to prayer. Helen Susan Taitonnen Jacobson was my mother, and she was the one who taught me to pray and to come to Jesus on my knees as my Savior and Friend.

My mother was not a theologian. Though she read her well-used Bible daily, she did not have a trained, academic understanding of "Biblical criticism" or scholarship. She never preached a sermon; she lived them. She never thought of "giving her testimony" to anyone. She lived that also.

Yet, I remember returning from worship one Sunday and Mom gave her critique of the sermon, something I remember her doing only this one time. She said, "Pastor preached today but he did not use the name Jesus once!" A sermon was to be centered in Jesus for my mother, centered in the grace and love of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus was to be "lifted up" and a sermon without Jesus was no sermon at all for her.

Helen was my mother and I think that she breathed the same air, the same Spirit, as the Apostle Paul who knew that preaching was not to be based on personal theories, the latest fads to hit the theological, social media or the thoughts of theologians. My mother and the Apostle Paul knew that for a sermon to be a sermon the focus, the power, the substance had to center in the person, the work, and the accomplishment of Jesus Christ for us.

In our Epistle lesson Paul wrote, "For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord..." and in I Cor 2:2 he wrote, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

I remember English classes in junior high and even high school where we had to diagram sentences. I'm not sure if they do that any more. The subject of the sentence is what or whom the rest of the sentence is about. The verb tells what the subject is doing or what the subject is.

It is so very easy for us as individuals and for us as a church, both as a congregation and as a denomination to lose the true subject and verb then of our faith and our life. When I become the subject of my life, or you become the subject of your life we are forever seeking to find fulfillment, happiness, purpose or worth and value in that which cannot provide for us what we need.

It is not that we are not Christian, but somehow we end up feeling as if we are not good enough. For so long, even as a

pastor I compared myself with other pastors and always ended up on the short end of the stick. I was never as good a preacher as someone else; I was always not good enough.

But similarly in my internship year at seminary I was at Good Samaritan hospital in Puyalup as a chaplain. I walked into a hospital room and there lay a retired pastor. I had often seen him visiting people in the hospital and now he lay in a hospital bed himself after suffering a severe heart attack.

He was crying; he was moaning: "I can't visit people anymore. I am a nobody. I can't do anything. I'm worthless." He repeated this over and over. In his desperation he had forgotten who he was, the beloved of God in Christ Jesus. He had tried to find his purpose and worth in visiting and now he felt that opportunity was gone, so he was now a nobody in his mind, worthless, having no value.

When anything, anyone becomes the subject of the sentences of our lives or the focus of our message, when we become the center of our lives, the source of our purpose and life then we have forgotten our message and forgotten the true subject of our lives. We have forgotten that we are truly loved, just as we are.

In John 5 Jesus said "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf." We can do all the study in the world. We can study the Bible; we can study the writing of theologians or other authors, but if our study does not lead us to a relationship with Jesus Christ we only learn *about* God, *about* Jesus, but we do

not get to know and experience God in Jesus personally. Getting to know about God is never enough, for to know about God leaves the knowledge in our head and not in our heart. To only know about God is not to experience ourselves as God's beloved.

Paul wrote, "Let light shine out of darkness." It seems that there is a darkness that is slowly, and sometimes rapidly sweeping across our land and our world. This is a darkness of corruption and of violence. It is a darkness of inhumanity and of self-centeredness. It is a darkness of isolation and of disrespect. It is a darkness that sometimes claims the name of Christ, but lives as if there is no Christ. It is a darkness that picks and chooses from Jesus what one likes, what makes a person comfortable in their self-centeredness. It is a darkness in which we have forgotten who we truly are, the beloved of God, loved intensely. We have forgotten that all people are truly, deeply loved by God.

It is when the world is so dark that the Church has a tremendous opportunity to proclaim the true light of God in Jesus Christ, for we have a message that the world desperately needs to hear. The light of Christ shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

And the gospel message given to the church is the gospel light for the world. Whether the world accepts it or not, the church is to be consistent in its proclamation. The method of proclamation will change, but the content of the gospel will not. The church loses its power, its foundation, its message if the church gets swept up by the spirit of the age in which we live, if

the church loses the content of the gospel. When Jesus is no longer the subject of our sentences we have lost what has been given to us as treasure. Then the church becomes as dark as the world around.

Paul went on to say "But we have this treasure in clay jars." One translator said, "We have this treasure in cracked pots."

We have a treasure, a fantastically beautiful and needed treasure, the gospel of God's gracious love and forgiveness, that we are loved just as we are, lock-stock- and barrow.

We have a message that is intended to reach, not only our heads but our hearts, and this message is that we are furiously loved by God, just the way we are. We are God's beloved. It is not that we have to change, have to improve, have to become better people. You are loved, as you are.

That is the treasure of our message and we proclaim it, live it, breath it just as we are, cracked pots. It is both because we know that we are loved the way we are that we can see our crackness, our brokenness and sin. It is also because we see our brokenness that we are open to hear Jesus call us beloved.

In Japan, instead of tossing broken items into trash heaps, some craftsmen practice the 500-year-old art of kintsugi, or "golden joinery," which is a method of restoring a broken piece with a lacquer that is mixed with gold, silver, or platinum.

In our society broken objects is have lost their value, but practitioners and admirers of kintsugi believe that never ending consumerism is not a spiritually rewarding experience. The kintsugi method conveys a philosophy not of replacement, but of awe, reverence, and restoration. That is also the message of the gospel.

God's forgiveness and God's restoration and God's healing of our lives is of infinite value and it is only found in the message of Jesus Christ. May we breath the air, the Spirit of the Apostle Paul and also of Helen Susan Taittonen Jacobson. May we ever rejoice in and proclaim the message of God in Jesus Christ that each one of us in him are beloved of God.