

**THE MAIN THING**  
**BLC – 6.3.18 – B. HULL SOMERS**

*Deuteronomy 5:12-15, 2 Corinthians 4:5-12, Mark 2:23-3:6*

When my father turned eighty several weeks ago he was vibrant and active. When we asked, gathered on my parent's porch with Afghani food on a beautiful San Antonio April evening, how it felt to turn eighty he said, "Like I don't have much time left."

Little did he know how true those words were. Only three weeks later, he died.

Eighty years old is not too young to die. It is a long, good life and he lived his well. You all at Burlington Lutheran seem to look at 80 and think nothing of it – many of you have graduated into the 90s and are still going strong.

Even though there seems to be something in the water at Burlington Lutheran, there is no way to know when any of us

will die. Some die as children. Others as octogenarians. There are no rules about how long any of us will live. There are a few things we can do to try and live longer but we all know of the stories of the folk who ate steak, butter and smoked a pack a day and lived to be 100 – the fact is that there is little we can do to stop the inevitable.

At the end of the day, we are impermanent in this iteration of life – clay jars as our Second Corinthians passage describes it. Clay jars filled with the most precious stuff in the universe – the imprint of God.

What I knew of my dad was a clay jar – his blue eyes and goofy grin, his big feet and runner's toenails, his great laugh and sharp wit. He was a clay jar filled with good, good things.

What is on the outside – what we look like, our nation of origin, how long we will live and who are our family are – are all things that are tenuous.

It is what is on the inside, discovering inside ourselves the imprint of God and finding and embracing our true, God given selves – that is the journey of this life. In short, to be who we were made to be.

Part of the beauty of finding ourselves and being unapologetically who we were made to be is also understanding that this life is temporary and fleeting. Tibetan Buddhist monks have a beautiful way of remembering the transitory nature of material life. They make intricate sand mandalas – basically murals made out of colored sand. Several monks often spend days making these elaborate and beautiful pictures of sand. When they are finished, they are breathtaking.

And when they are finished, they are destroyed. The days of work and toil are wiped away in minutes. The sand is gathered together, wrapped in silk and taken to a river to be placed back into nature.

This is what our lives are – beautiful toil, colorful and bright and then gone...washed back into everything that God has made.

This is our journey as human beings and people of faith – to embrace our true selves and the fact that these true selves have an expiration date. And, hopefully, we are emboldened by these truths to live with purpose and grace – demonstrating the good things of God – truth, grace, peace, hope and, above all, love, that have been embedded in us through Jesus. Clay pots with the beauty of God inside.

The Pharisees in our Gospel did not get it. They had been following Jesus and the disciples around – or at least had spies. There is no other way they would know that Jesus and the disciples had been eating the tips of grain as they travelled. And they did. They had eyes and ears everywhere – creepers at best, stalkers with murderous intentions at worst.

They were waiting for Jesus and his followers to make a mistake that they could pounce on and the Sabbath laws provided them opportunity. But even the laws that they used to trap Jesus were not intended to trap anyone. In the great tradition of the religious taking rules meant to set us free and instead using them to oppress and control, the Pharisees missed the point.

Deuteronomy that we read today lays out the rules for keeping Sabbath. Interestingly, it is all about community. It was

meant for a day of equalizing under God. A reminder that God does not see a distinction between God's children. The Sabbath rest was not just for the rich heads of households. It was the women, the children, the slaves, the resident aliens – the immigrants in their midst – Sabbath was a day where everyone was counted as child of God and invited to rest and be in community together. It is a part of the story of God and God's people – an ever expanding community experiencing radical grace.

So the Pharisees planned to blow the whistle on Jesus and the disciples for not keeping Sabbath even though they missed the point of Sabbath. They missed the point of what Sabbath was for, they missed the point of the law in general – Jesus told us what was important about the law, remember: love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and love

your neighbor as yourself. They missed the point of this journey of life – thinking that keeping others excluded and controlled and in fear was preferable to staying open, curious and malleable.

And, worst of all, they missed the point of Jesus.

After Jesus and the disciples ate that raw grain. Which, they had to be pretty hungry to eat. After Jesus and the disciples ate that nasty raw grain they saw a man with a withered hand and Jesus healed him.

The Pharisees did not take that moment to be filled with awe. They did not look into the healed man's face and feel grateful for him – fellow human being – who has just been given a new life. They did not think of the possibilities for the community to have someone like Jesus on hand healing people and changing lives.

No. They were afraid.

They were afraid of the healing. They were afraid of the change that was coming because of this great, powerful love. They were afraid that they would lose their influence. They were afraid that another theology would rule over their own. They were afraid of losing control in the community. They were not happy, grateful, or in awe – they were afraid.

And one of the terrible byproducts of fear is anger. So much of the vitriol and anger that we see in others is based in fear. Fear and anger are not fruits of the spirit – they are not of God. They are the enemies of love.

The Pharisees were clay jars filled with sticky, selfish fear. They were the kind of clay jar that looks really pretty on the outside but if you catch a whiff of what is inside your stomach will churn.

The Gospel says that Jesus was “grieved” by their “hardness of heart.”

This is Jesus, after all. Jesus did not love the disciples more than the Pharisees. Jesus did not have more compassion for the man with the withered hand than the men with withered hearts. Jesus came with love for all. Everyone.

There are so many – religious and otherwise – that need to hear the good news of God’s love and acceptance. Our world is desperate for the equalizing reign of God.

What if, that day, the Pharisees saw the very hungry disciples and invited them to the priestly table, set with tithes from the people so that they did not need to eat the heads of the grain. What if, that day, when the man with the withered man was healed, the Pharisees allowed their hearts to be filled with joy for that man – for his future – he was, after all, one of

their parishioners. What if, that day, the Pharisees decided to open their hearts and minds rather than double down on fear, the law and control?

If the church were to truly step up in the Love of Jesus in boldness, without fear or judgment, the world would change. If we could give up our penchant for control, our idolatry of building and doctrines, our judgmental self-righteousness, our special pews, and cut our own chains so that we can see that we are Christians together here – not for our own numbers or growth or anything else – but for the sake of the world. If we could embrace that our worship, that our prayer, that our relationships with one another, that our sacraments, that our service – is all meant to saturate the world with God's love. If we could be that, do that, own that – the world would change. Burlington would change. The Skagit Valley would change. Our

hearts would change, soften, filled and permeable with God's love.

We are all clay jars – with varying expiration dates. Each of us is unique and yet each of us is able to be filled with the same love and power – the love and power of Jesus. May we allow it to be carried forth in us – in the vessels of our lives. May we allow it to change us from the inside out...allowing our real selves to shine through, illuminated by this truth. May we – for as many days as we have – point to Jesus. Amen.

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