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We have this treasure in clay jars. 2 Corinthians 4, 7.

The Pandemic has been a brutal, humbling reminder of how fragile we human creatures are. In St. Paul's day, even the huge clay storage jars, the amphorae with their swollen bellies, could so easily shatter into pieces. There's even a whole hillside of such ancient fragments in Rome. I'm sure we can all recall that helpless dismay we felt when favourite pottery items of our own fell over and smashed beyond repair. We ourselves are indeed earthenware, however we may pretend otherwise. The name 'Adam', the Genesis starting-point for humanity, means 'from the soil' ('Adamah). In Blaise Pascal's simple words: 'We are something, but we are not everything.' Through God's amazing Grace, these earth-bound containers that we are can be **filled** - and with treasure.

Much more so than words like 'riches' or 'wealth', **'treasure'** suggests wonder, excitement, untold possibilities - and Jesus tells us to lift and school our eyes towards what is true treasure: 'Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' Matthew 6, 19-21. This is a stern challenge to our own materialistic times and impulses, with adverts and other beguiling voices continually cajoling us to acquire more and more worldly things. Jesus's parables, however, reveal that there's nothing to compare with the absolute **joy** of the community of love, the kingdom of heaven, both in this world and the next.

In spreading this wondrous, overwhelming news, Paul writes 'You are **enriched in Christ**... enriched in every way...' and he knew this in every fibre of his being, from good times but also bad times. Paul's Second Letter to the believers in Corinth was very different from his first one. In the interim, terrible things had shaken him, and he writes out of deep personal anguish: 'We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair.' 2 Corinthians 4, 9. For a while, he even faced hostility from some in Corinth, and urged them to look beyond himself, an all-too-human messenger: they should focus instead on the message - of Christ. In his Letter, he explores how Christ's suffering and rising from death opens a transformative way of being for each one of us. God goes on loving us, such is His Grace towards us. In Jesus, He joined us. In the Holy Spirit, He's at work around us now, in ways we may well not realise.

In this Pandemic, we've had to separate off from others, to protect them and ourselves from infection. We're being challenged, however, to dismantle any remaining self-made watch-towers of separation.

Yes, we're earthenware vessels, but we can be eager to be filled through God's Grace, for the work of love He hopes from us each day.

In prayer now, to be open to God, here are two verses from Mission Praise no. 67:-

Breathe on me, breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love
And do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, breath of God,
till I am wholly Thine,
until this earthly part of me
glows with Thy fire divine.

Tony Mann

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