

## The Perfectly Imperfect Mr. L

By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

### 2 Corinthians 4:5-12



*5 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," [a] made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*

Let's play a game. Two teams. Person in front pew is the captain. Your job is to make a plan to move a balloon from front to back and front again using the team on your side of the church. Once the captain let's go of the balloon , no holding the balloon til it returns to captain. Got it? Go.

(Balloons travel back and forth the length of the church)

Lets talk...

Did you have a plan for how your balloon would travel? (*Sort of.* )

Did it go as planned? (*We thought it would move faster, and straighter. It didn't always go where we wanted it to go.*)

What could you control? What couldn't you control? (*Once we let go we couldn't control much.*)

Folks in the church at Corinth were complaining that Paul was a pretty pathetic spokesman for Christianity. They noted that he had recently been putting Christians on trial and condemning them, thus his presence as a leader/captain, was confusing to the cause. They wondered how people could trust someone who had so recently converted...or did he? They wanted the perfect person to carry out the perfect mission of sharing Jesus' Good News. In today's lesson, Paul reminds the early church that Jesus did not expect us to be about perfection, but we are to let the perfect shine through our flaws.

*For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," [a] made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*

Did you hear how Paul makes this about Jesus and not himself? I remember as a young minister reading “*we have this treasure in jars of clay*” to mean that we were full of amazing gifts to let loose on the world. As a more seasoned pastor I realize that the gifts are not necessarily ours. Paul is describing how despite or because of *our* flaws, God’s glory can leak out, to be known by the world around us. God makes it happen...not us. Our shortcomings and short sightedness *show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*

I have observed over these past 6 months that this congregation is made up of a lot of perfectionists. We work really hard. We are really smart. We think stuff through to decent and caring conclusions...

- from the planting of the troughs
- to creating Sunday School lessons,
- to the music Fimi and choir offer up.
- To caring for folks who are sick or shut in
- To supporting local charities
- To rummage sale

We work toward a perfect presentation in everything that we do, and as a newcomer I observe, we are surprised when all of our planning takes unexpected turns like our little balloon demonstration. We are vexed when some well meaning person hits the balloon high in the air instead of keeping it low. We are flummoxed and frustrated when the air currents take the balloon in a different direction than we anticipated. We are disappointed

that the process didn't go as planned (even though it rarely goes as planned) and yet I also notice that we still kept the balloon moving toward its goal of getting it back to the team captain.

*8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*

When Walter Law built this church I am quite sure he believed it was state of the art, meant to last for eternity, gift to God, like his beloved parish churches in England.

And then the church grew...and he needed to add on transepts.

And then the church grew...and we needed to add a Fellowship building and Beebe Hall. And it was state of the art when it was completed. A wonderful addition...until we learned about sound systems and air conditioning.

And then the church grew spiritually and became ONA and we realized that all of the wonderful things Mr. Law and the people before us had put into place were not accessible for folks who used walkers or wheelchairs. We could not share the Good News and Spirit we experience here in community within Mr. Law's failure, unless we built a ramp...or two...or A, X, Y or E.

And we come today having already voted for a project that has doubled in cost due to human imperfections in calculating that cost...and we have a challenge before us...like Mr. L had a challenge...like our balloon challenge, and if anything is clear about this challenge it is that despite our best plans it will not go as planned!

We will have missed something that may not even be invented yet, some aspect that nobody thought to consider...and the people who follow us will be grousing about why we didn't do things "right."

And it turns out...that's ok.

It's ok for things on our end to not go perfectly (we can expect it and embrace it!) because our failures allow God's glory, compassion, mercy, and justice, to shine more brightly.

Our lemons will be opportunity for others to experience God's lemonade, because at the end of the day we aren't building ramps for us, we're building them so that more of God's people can have a place to worship God! So that folks can come together in perfectly flawed community and worship in a perfectly imperfect building an amazingly awesome Savior! It's not about us...

In the meantime, whatever we decide, it will be right to say that a ramp into this building (however flawed) will provide access to more people than no ramp into this building.

It is right to say that even though whatever we vote on doesn't go as planned (and it won't), we will be faithful to our calling to be ONA (a spiritual declaration) when that ramp is in place.

It is right to say that God will forgive us our shortcomings and use the opportunities we create to shine on everyone who enters through Mr. L's perfectly imperfect, faithfully flawed doors.

Like the early church that wrestled with who was an appropriate ambassador of the faith and who was not...like Walter Law, who built a wonderfully flawed testament to his faith in God's love...we need to take our shot and do what we believe will be the best for letting God's light shine here...with the knowledge that ultimately the balloon will move where we don't want it to go. The schemes we develop will fall short of someone's expectations. We will miss the mark and some congregation meeting here 50 years from now will be wondering why we didn't just use whatever technology they have at their fingertips to do the "perfectly imperfect" thing.

Let's play anyway, like our spiritual forebears did, remembering that *we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. Amen.*