

**2023-11-29 ... 6.30pm Thanksgiving and Memorial Address ... Mrs Jane Rylands****Isaiah 43: 1-4a; 2 Corinthians 4: 5-12**

Two very comforting readings this evening. The great prophet Isaiah with his wonderful poetic preaching and St Paul writing to the Christians in Corinth.

I am a lover of pots. The Great Pottery Throwdown is one of my favourite TV programmes. Who would have thought that a lump of clay could be shaped, spun on a wheel, baked in a hot oven to produce such a huge variety of end products.

Perhaps it's just me, but I love that Paul compares himself to a clay jar. We know how wonderful our bodies are and yet at the same time how vulnerable they are to cracking and acquiring chips. And how sometimes they break and can't be stuck back together again.

American schools, I gather from the TV, have year books and sometimes do lists of 'pupil most likely to .... Be President, win an Olympic gold' – that sort of thing. Paul would not have been the pupil most likely to spread the word of God throughout the Gentile world. In human eyes, he would fail every qualification. It seems he was not a particularly good speaker, he was not a physically fit person, not to mention that he had spent his early adulthood persecuting those same people he now tells of Jesus, hounding them to death. And yet, having encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus he was animated by a new understanding of God, his life took on this unlikely turn. His mission hindered by his vulnerabilities but not thwarted.

Paul talks about how he has survived many difficulties, kept on going even though the world has thrown many terrible and terrifying times his way, as it did Jesus. We recognise this resilience in our loved ones too, if not always in ourselves. It is one of the things which makes us love them – the way that character overcomes the bad times, or at least lessens the blow a little. The laughter that is found, the ability to care about someone else's troubles, the joy in simple things, the effort to get better.

Paul says that this treasure we have within us, which shows itself as the ability to give out goodness no matter what, is the light of God within us. And when we recognise it for what it is we also gain confidence in the promise that we will be raised into the presence of God because we are, each one of us precious in God's sight.

Thank God and amen!