

For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. (2 Corinthians 4:6-7)

We Have This Treasure

by Dorothy Bass

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More than a century ago, a prospector named Holden went treasure hunting in the North Cascades. He found what he was looking for in the side of a barely-accessible mountain twelve miles above Lake Chelan. Later, hundreds of miners would make a pretty good living off this treasure trove. When the copper market collapsed, however, the miners and their families were driven from their jobs and homes.

As economic crisis grips the world today, millions of people have likewise lost their jobs and homes. Many worry that they won't be able to afford retirement or wonder where they will find work and daily sustenance for their families. Times are tough, and treasure is on our minds.

This summer, the treasure portrayed by the apostle Paul in the second letter to the Corinthians will be at the center of a lively conversation in the same village that once housed those copper miners. What are we to make of **this** treasure, and what does having it mean for our lives and the life of the world? This is a different treasure than that provided by copper ore and well-paying jobs, but it does not float above the material world. In Paul's image, this treasure resides in ordinary vessels fashioned by workers from the stuff of the earth. It fills God-fashioned jars of clay like you and me. It cannot be earned or deposited in a vault, and the jars that bear it are not meant to be sealed with wax and set upon a shelf. **This** treasure is all gift, and it is meant to be spent. It is the currency in a divine economy of abundance in which grace overflows every limit "as it extends to more and more people" (4:15).

"Light" is one of Paul's many images for this treasure. Of all the goods we need, light is the most freely distributed; it shines in all directions across the universe.

However, light is impossible to perceive until it rests on something. In our theme text, the uncontainable, life-giving, darkness-defeating light of the Creator comes to a focus in one face—a human face that knows death and at the same time shines with the glory of God. Remarkably, God has also “shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” To live in faith before this face, writes the theologian David Ford, “is to have a criterion for all authority and a liberation from the idolatries of power. Above all it is to live in freedom and love.”

This summer, the light spoken at Creation will fill Railroad Creek Valley each morning. “Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world,” will be our evening song. And sharing knowledge of God and God’s world—learning together in freedom and love, challenging and being challenged—will be a regular part of village life. In sessions, forums, and informal conversations, we’ll study Scripture, read and write poetry, ponder difficult theological and ethical questions, explore the natural world, be called to make peace and address poverty, and more.

All summer long, villagers will pour into the earthy container known as Holden. Some will likely come to the mountains above Lake Chelan hoping to find treasure, and some may find treasure by surprise. What is certain is that all who come will enrich village life. Within Holden’s economy of abundance, their gifts will be shared in sessions and at the snack bar, in friendships and over fresh bread, in worship and at work. And as villagers depart these gifts will overflow the container as they are carried down the mountain, as treasure to be poured out in the world.

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