

5-1-2008

"We have this treasure in clay jars": the installation of the Rev. Raymond Schultz as national bishop

Telmar G. Sartison

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Sartison, Telmar G. (2008) ""We have this treasure in clay jars": the installation of the Rev. Raymond Schultz as national bishop," *Consensus*: Vol. 32 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol32/iss2/9>

This Sermons is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

HISTORICAL SERIES, 14
“We Have This Treasure in Clay Jars”:
The Installation of the Rev. Raymond Schultz
as National Bishop

Telmor G. Sartison

*National Bishop (Ret.),
 Evangelical Lutheran Church In Canada
 Calgary, Alberta*

(The Rev. Telmor G. Sartison was the second National Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church In Canada, serving in this ministry from 1993 to 2001, when he retired. Prior to this ministry he had been the first Bishop of the Saskatchewan Synod of the ELCIC, 1986 to 1993. This sermon was preached 15 September 2001 at the Service of Installation of his successor, Bishop Raymond L. Schultz, as National Bishop. The Service fell on the heels of the shattering “Nine-Eleven” event, namely, the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001 - to which the sermon refers.)

Text: I Corinthians 4:7 - *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.*

I overheard these words on the bus on Friday: “This week has been a week from hell.” September 11th will be remembered for your lifetime, and mine, and beyond – as a day of tragedy, a day of indiscriminate violence, a day of loss and mind-boggling events, a day that marks the beginning of a grief that will not go away ... if it goes away at all.

We will live for a while in a state of shock. We have been violated. It hurts. It is extremely painful. We lost something we thought we had. What was it – Safety? Security? A right to be free of the trouble others live with on a daily basis?

Or maybe we lost our innocence. The blinders were forced from our eyes. No more rosy coloured glasses. Everything from life to bank account, from travel to solitude in our homes, has been threatened.

Something left us on Tuesday. North America joined the world of extreme violence, the world of the suicide bomber, the world of mass death and destruction. Even two world wars left us free of these experiences on home soil.

The week was/is a week from hell.

We have this treasure, life itself, in clay jars. It escapes our grasp in accident and disease. Another's violence or carelessness can take life away from us. We want but have not the ability to hold on and maintain control. We have this treasure in clay pots, earthen vessels.

But I want to tell you this day, this day that marks an important beginning in our Church, that while I am shocked by Tuesday, I am more in awe of what might follow. The horror of what happened then can easily be surpassed by the horror of what might follow. I do not think that this incident, as severe and as terrible as it is, deserves the level of rhetoric that it is getting. Yes, it is terrible. But it is not war. Justice must be served. But more and greater violence in the name of revenge cannot be justified. One act of indiscriminate violence dare not breed another. The two do not go together. Where will it end?

We must pray earnestly and fervently that the grace of God, the wisdom of God, and the purpose of God for all people will prevail in this time of pain, hurt pride, self-righteous indignation, and the search for revenge.

It is a scary time. If the powers that be respond in the wrong way, it could become scarier yet. We have discovered again that the balance between security and chaos has a very fine edge.

We have this treasure, life itself, in clay jars, or, as an older translation says it, we have this treasure in earthen vessels.

On Friday evening two young boys and I went for a grandfather/grandsons walk. Actually it was a walk for the dog, and we tagged along. One of the first questions was, "Grandpa, do you think there will be a nuclear war?"

I hadn't thought of that one. The question had to come from someone very young and very simply wise.

Where are we going? Who goes with us? How can we get from here to Micah's vision?

*They shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore;*

*but they shall all sit under their own vines
and under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.* (Micah 4:3-4)

Has anyone asked the question, What is the fear or experience that drives others to hate us so much that they will scheme and plan and train for months and maybe even years in order to take their own lives in the taking of the lives of thousands of others? What is the message we are missing this week? What is it we need to learn about ourselves, we North Americans and Europeans, the world’s great consumers, explorers and exploiters unmatched, chief users of energy, magnanimous contributors to environmental crises? Is there something we need to learn about ourselves before we strike back with all the high tech yet indiscriminate power at our disposal?

We have this treasure in clay jars, in earthen vessels. The clay pot theme, as you are already aware, comes from our second Reading. In chapters preceding the text, Paul talks about hard times on his missionary journey in Asia: *We were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.*

What was the cause of this difficulty for Paul and his associates? They told the story of God who in Christ’s self-giving death and resurrection does what the law cannot do: In Christ God forgives us and makes us children of God.

The clay jars are the human, you and me. The picture is one of weakness and fragility. This is the cheap clay pot, the easily broken and maybe even leaky vessel. How is it God chooses to reside with us? How is it that God chooses us to be messengers and disciples? We are so weak and at times so faithless. Let us sing the hymns when the cost is light; but don’t call on me for too much of whatever it is that I am or have.

I used to think that pastors and church leaders must be extremely strong and diligent people of the faith in order to be given the task of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. But I found out that we are all clay jars, earthen vessels, called by God to carry and pour out the good news of Jesus Christ.

Paul puts it this way. Speaking about the difficulties he reminds us who we are: *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.*

He says, *It is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

We have this treasure: the gospel, life itself, the call of God to follow, we have this treasure in clay jars.

We get caught up in self so easily. Maybe we need to repent of our self-centredness. Maybe this whole episode – this week from hell – is a call to stop and listen, listen to others and listen to God; a call to work for healing; a call to make a difference; a call to “pay it forward” as a movie title suggests, not “pay it back”; to pay forward to a future instead of repay for a past.

Last evening we indulged in food, laughter, and song at a banquet. We celebrated with one another our ministry together. Today we celebrate the installation of Raymond Schultz as National Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church In Canada. On to the future with those wonderful old hymns and Confessions and Scriptures to ground us.

But remember: It is on to the future. Pay it forward. Go together with questions that allow God to sort out the confusion. We don't have the answers. Only God does. We have only questions. Ask the right questions – the questions that acknowledge our own sinfulness and seek God's grace, intervention, and glory.

We are weak. But we are children of God through Christ Jesus. We are accompanied. We and our leaders in church and society are weak in compassion and will, weak in our resolve; but God is compassionate and faithful and lives toward us out of the great good news of the gospel 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.

Therefore today, as we celebrate the installation of Bishop Ray, we also pray for the healing of the nations. *Kyrie Eleison. Amen.*