



Lent reflection for March 22, 2024

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2 Corinthians 4:1-12

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing clearly the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus's sake. For it is the God who said, "Light will 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 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. We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying around in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For we who are living are always being handed over to death for Jesus's sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us but life in you.

Today's Reflection is by Emily Newland

I can't read this passage without remembering, with nostalgia and cringe, my youth as an Evangelical and the music we consumed, which included the alternative rock band Jars of Clay. They had a crossover hit in the 90s called Flood about deliverance from helplessness, which is very on-message with this passage. Any bridge from our insular youth group culture to the "world" was thrilling to me. I always assumed that a hit on the pop charts by a Christian band would lead to my non-Christian friends finding their way to Jesus. To be fair, reading the comments below Flood's YouTube video indicates that some did find salvation through this song, but my experience was that my friends thought the song was cool, and didn't think

about it after that. The pattern has repeated with artists like Sufjan Stevens or David Bazan, where somehow what seems a very explicit message about Jesus was missed, even while the album was widely acclaimed.

If you're unfamiliar with these artists, I hope you'll pardon the specific examples. You may be able to think of artists from other generations or mediums that accomplished crossover success. How often is the explicit message "veiled" like this, I wonder? And isn't this ok, if a Christian brings a bit of Light to someone who was not looking for it (or who may have even been "perishing")? Though my zealous youth group leaders urged us to spread the gospel in crystal-clear terms, as an adult I've discovered that, like these artists, there is a more urgent need to connect by acknowledging how difficult life is and how dark our hearts can be.

In this passage, we are likened to fragile clay jars – anxious, depressed, prone to sickness and grief – and this seems to be God's preferred vessel for communicating to the world. May we not forget, during this heavy season of Lent, that herein is our crossover appeal.



Emily Newland moved to New York from the Midwest a decade ago and is still surprised to be raising a kid in Brooklyn with her husband Warren. Emily works in the language industry (translation and interpretation) and remembers fondly the fun things she used to do before becoming her daughter Maple's number one playmate.