

**“FINDING THE TREASURE”**  
**Scarboro United Church**  
**Final Sermon Preached by Judy Chapman**  
**June 14, 2009**

**Scripture:** Psalm 139 (VU # 861)  
2 Corinthians 3: 18; 4: 7- 9

As I began to think about what I might say to you this morning on my last Sunday to preach, I knew that I wanted to tell you what a *treasure* you have been to me over the past 15 years – hence the passage from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. Paul says, “Yet we who have *this spiritual treasure are like common clay pots*, in order to show that the supreme power belongs to God.” We are ordinary vessels made from the stuff of the earth – yet at our core is this wonderful *spiritual treasure*. It is the part of us that *matures but does not age*; the part of us that *does not die* – even when our bodies do.

I am conscious this morning of the *spiritual treasure* that is here in this sanctuary because you have come to this place. And I am conscious of the *treasure* that *lingers here* because others have shared their lives with us. Their essence is interwoven with ours. And I am speaking both of the people who journeyed with us for a time and then moved away - for any number of reasons that people move away - and also of those who have died. The ones, who died, are a part of that *great cloud of witnesses* we remember collectively every year on “All Souls Day” and individually whenever we recall those loved ones who were a part of community, a part of our lives. When they left us, we wondered how we would ever manage without them, and yet we did – as much as we missed them, life went on. We *treasure* our

memories of them and when *their passions* are also *our passions*, we carry on the work that was important to them.

As I contemplated this idea of *spiritual treasure*, I asked myself what was the *treasure* for me in this place these past 15 years? What were the best things for me? What were the highlights of my time here?

No doubt, one of the best things for me was talking to the children during Theme Time. Or even watching as *someone else* did that Theme Time. I was always aware of the kids' joy and excitement and innocence and their openness to awe and wonder.

I was also aware sometimes of their parents' anxiety. What was Kevin or Kathleen, Robbie or Alexander going to blurt out? They were so open and honest. Would they embarrass themselves or their parents?

I never laughed *at* them but sometimes *with* them. I was conscious that they weren't there to entertain us. Yet, *how we loved to hear what they had to say*.

Talking to the children was also an opportunity for me to look at the scripture and try to put into a few, simple words what was important in the story, to try to get to the *heart of the message*. What was the *nugget of truth*; what was the *treasure* at the core of the passage? This practice, more than anything else, helped to improve my preaching.

You see how those children stretch us in our understanding?  
Spiritual treasure in *small* clay pots.

Other highlights were favorite worship services – usually the ones that were “youth infused,” to use Erika's new phrase.

One of those was the 4:30 p.m. Christmas Eve Family Service – with all its noise and confusion and excitement. Over all those years, I remember Jill and Marilyn, Frances and Nancy, Erika and Susan and Liz faithfully

working to make those services happen. I remember Wendy and friends who always helped to cue the characters from the back of the sanctuary and to dress the children as angels, or shepherds or animals or sometimes wise ones. There were usually a *multitude of angels* and *far more shepherds* than sheep, but we were mostly okay with that. Shepherd costumes are easier to make *and far easier to wear* than sheep costumes.

I especially remember the rehearsals. In the early years I would walk away from those rehearsals fearing that the pageant would be a disaster because the kids seemed to be barely paying attention – playing at every available opportunity as children do. *I learned from experience* that it all turns out in the end.

But I have to tell you that in the last few years as Mary and Joseph got younger and younger and younger, I had to *relearn the lesson*. On Christmas Eve it all came together - even if Mary was obviously miffed at Joseph for whatever reason – oh well! The crowd barely noticed – or maybe it just didn't matter in the grand scheme of things. Somehow we got through. And the children from a *very, very, very young age* learned the story because they were a part of it.

Another worship event that was always a *treasure* for me was our Easter celebration, beginning with the Palm Sunday drama. There were *so many ways* we told the ancient tale over the years, trying to *bring to life* a story that was so familiar to all of us. I am grateful for the people who entered into this sacred task – the writers who adapted plays for us, the set designers, costume makers, actors, directors, musicians and, most essentially, those who came to listen and watch and enter into the Palm/Passion drama as it unfolded.

And, of course, there were the Easter vigils. Every year we wondered if all the time slots would be filled, but every year we were rescued by a few people who filled in where needed. Many had their “favorite hours” to keep the vigil. But everyone who entered this darkened sanctuary found blessing in *the silent waiting that happens between death and resurrection.*

I also *treasured* the Outdoor Worship and Picnic that happens each year on the last Sunday in June. It was fun and casual and I liked that. It also marked the beginning of summer holidays and a slower pace as our programming stopped and we shared worship with St. Matthew’s.

But the picnic represented more than the beginning of the summer to me. It was also a reminder that we can’t contain God in a place of our own making. Some people say that the natural world is the only “book” that God has written. I think what they mean by that is that the earth contains lessons for us about our own life cycles of living, dying and rebirth. . . . In addition to that, the earth is a *living organism* that supports all of life. It is God’s gift to us – it is a *treasure* beyond measure.

But mostly, the *spiritual treasure* that I experienced at Scarboro was *in the sharing of our faith and our lives.* It was a privilege to gather with people – both long time Christians and newcomers to the faith - to examine the ancient scriptures and contemporary writings about God and our response to God’s call on our lives. It was a privilege to gather in prayer *for and with* those who were in need of healing. It was a privilege to be with people in their significant life passages: to meet with families experiencing the death of a loved one; to baptize precious children into the community of faith; and to solemnize the marriages of couples *vibrant with faith, hope and love.*

It was a privilege to work with the many dedicated people who have served on committees and on the Official Board of this church. The Board tries to hold the vision of what we *can do and be* as a church in this little corner of the world. There are some exciting plans for the future afoot, including a possible building redevelopment.

Throughout the years I have received so much from everyone I have met in this place. I have learned from all of you who do the day-to-day work of education, pastoral care, service, outreach and justice. You have taught me so much by your love, your generosity, and your faith.

I remember fondly, too, all the wonderful community-building events that were part of the *ever evolving traditions* in this place – the Fall Fair, the Garage Sale, Turkey Burgers, the Elda Daniels Luncheon, the Retreat, and the Fruits of the Spirit Weekend, the Outdoor Worship and Picnic. These were times when we got to know each other over food and fun, laughter and labor, prayer and silence, music and art.

When it came to significant *outreach endeavors*, I confess that I was mostly a proud bystander, looking at all that was accomplished through your work with Cause Canada; the Christmas Hampers; the Reading Project at Connaught; Inn From the Cold; Women in Black, and refugee families.

There was also the work of becoming an Affirming Ministry – work that began with one person, Betsy Young, asking us (persistently) to consider exploring the process of becoming an Affirming Congregation (as it was called back then). That process led to our congregational decision to publicly declare our commitment to invite, welcome and affirm all people regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity into full participation in and leadership of this congregation. Our Service of Celebration of becoming an Affirming Ministry was a high holy moment - as was the first

same gender marriage conducted here. And I had the privilege of officiating at that wedding of Krista Hummel and Vera May Fair.

I have been *blessed*, too, with excellent colleagues in this place. I have to make special mention here of Mela Becker, who has managed our church office for 20 years. She is organized, efficient and keeps us all on track – as well as providing a listening ear and assuring presence for those who phone or come in to the office. She has been a good friend and an invaluable support for me. When the work seemed overwhelming, Mela always found a way to put things into perspective. And she keeps us laughing - lest we take ourselves too seriously or get too stressed.

I have been very fortunate to work with many fine people over the years – with Marin, Morris, Cindy, and Melinda; with Marilyn and Jill; with Jamie, Frances, Susan, Melanie and Liz; with Bill, Garth, and Paul. My longest-term colleague in ministry, of course, was Bill Phipps, who was a trusted friend and experienced guide. He was a great *encourager* for me personally and I know for many others as well.

All my ministry colleagues have brought their own personalities, interests and particular set of skills. I once said to some Board Members that Bill's focus was on the world, Garth's was on the church, and mine was on the individual. I think that is what made those teams work well. We were very different.

Working with Paul for almost two years now, I have discovered that we are more alike than different. That may surprise some of you, but I think it is true. With my retiring, and a new team forming, there will be greater opportunities again to cover more of the bases.

In the next few years with many churches across the city experiencing challenging times and dwindling numbers, there will be lots of opportunities

to think outside the box. Keep in mind that it will be important to pull together – and I hope you will give Paul your cooperation and support. Keep in mind, too, that you do not walk alone – that even though we have this *spiritual treasure*, the supreme power belongs to God. May you continue to rely on God’s power as you seek to reach out to the community.

Just one more “thank you” I need to say this morning and that is to my husband, David. Through all the long days and late nights when I was busy working, Dave became quite self-sufficient. As well as having a busy work schedule himself, he mastered all the household chores and still manages to keep his 5 handicap on the golf course. And so I thank you, Dave, for all your support over the years and for sharing me with so many other people.

That would be true for my other family members who are here this morning or will be joining us later.

I have now talked a very long time and *barely scratched the surface of my gratitude to you* for all that you meant to me – for all the *treasure* you *have shared with me* over the past 15 years.

Thank you all so very, very much.

Amen