

Don't Lose Heart – It's Not Eternal!

3rd Sun. after Pent. – 06/09/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 16 [Paul talks to us all as Christians and says,] **“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.”**

Introduction

✘ It's common for those of us today to think, “I could never compare to the great St. Paul.” But in verses 13-15 at the beginning of today's Epistle Reading, Paul corrects that thinking by telling us he is able to come to you and me here today and speak to us through God's Word as one Christian to another – face to face as it were.

➔ In verse 13 he says that “we have the same spirit of faith.” Though hundreds of years may have passed, the one true Christian faith has not changed one bit.

➔ In verse 14 he bases that on three unchangeable facts: First we “know” that God “raised the Lord Jesus” from the dead, and second, we know that God “will raise us also with Jesus”, and third, we know that He will “bring [Paul and the other apostles] with you (and me) into His presence.” In other words, the undisputed truth that true Christians of all times all believe is that Jesus' victory over death won the victory over death for us too, which means that we are all headed to the same place – God's heavenly presence. That means that we are all in the same family.

➔ And so, because of that, Paul wraps his arms around all of us here this morning and he just states a fact in verse 16, “We (Christians) do not lose heart.”

✘ There is a billboard in various places around the country that shows a track runner, Marlon Shirley, in his starter's crouch, ready for the starting gun to go off. But at the end of one of his legs he has a prosthetic runner's blade instead of foot. And the four words on the billboard say, “Lost leg. Not heart.”

➔ Marlon was the first lower leg amputee to break the 11-second mark in the 100 meter dash, setting a time of 10.91 seconds in 2007. To learn of Marlon's story is to hear about one setback after another from his childhood in an orphanage to numerous obstacles and rejections because of his amputation. But Marlon refused to give up. He did not lose heart.

✘ Today Paul tells you and me the same thing: “We do not lose heart” (v. 16). No matter what may be going on around us; no matter how much we're going through with our failing bodies, our mental capacities, our emotions, our family or other relationship struggles, we do not lose heart. We don't get so discouraged that we give up. We're not so worn out that we give in. We don't lose hope. We do not lose heart.

I. Our afflictions don't feel light and momentary.

✘ And that's why many of us here may think that we could never compare to the great St. Paul. Because, you may think, “Paul has no clue what I'm actually going through. Who is he to call this heavy stuff that I have to deal with ‘light and momentary’? Because it sure doesn't feel light, and it certainly doesn't seem momentary.”

➔ In fact, according to all of the outward evidence, just like some of our family members or friends may be telling us, we are just “wasting our time with all of this Jesus stuff.” In fact, trying to follow Jesus and live as He teaches us we should; turning the other cheek when someone wants to fight with me at school; not giving in to the pressure – or the desire to go along with them when they say that the world came about from a big bang, or that a couple doesn't need to be married before having sex, or that marriage is just an old-fashioned idea; obeying Jesus and

thinking that we really should love our enemies and default to an attitude of forgiveness rather than vengeance – trying to live this way – well, that only seems to bring more affliction Paul; more grief into this earthly life, so, Paul, “Why would I want to do that?”

✘ And then there is the fact that our aging bodies and our tormented emotions and our overworked minds truly are like what Paul calls an old worn out “tent” here in this text (5:1).

→ And that’s not only for the older ones among us. I mean, there is only so much bullying at school or on social media that a person can take; only so much pressure to live up to our parents’ expectations before it finally just breaks our mental health; our ability to keep on going.

→ Not to make light, of course of the actual breaking down and tearing apart of this “tent” that is our earthly body either. There are those here in this small congregation that are dealing with serious, progressive diseases like Parkinson’s, Rheumatoid and Osteo- arthritis, various kinds of cancer, Alzheimer’s or other kinds of dementia, diabetes, chronic joint and pain issues and more. All of which the devil and our sinful nature uses to drain and sap our desire to keep going; to fulfill Jesus’ mission of *Sharing God’s Word* at every opportunity that we have, and *Serving All* people with His love and grace even when we just want to focus on ourselves; just want to ignore all of those around us.

✘ The list could go on and on about the ways that our “outer nature is wasting away” as Paul says in verse 16. We live in a day and age when uncertainty and extreme anxiety seems to only be increasing so that more and more people are just giving up, giving in and losing hope.

→ Neither Paul nor I need to tell you about your own afflictions; the things that you actually face each and every day; that tempt you and torture you to the point of losing heart; that egg you on to think that it’s just not worth arguing or fighting with my spouse or friends or parents – or even myself anymore about this living as a Christian thing. It’s just not worth it!

✘ Maybe Paul can say that “we do not lose heart,” but maybe Paul was just a better and stronger person than I am.

II. Christ’s resurrection tells us a different story.

✘ But you see, that’s why Paul has every right to talk with you and me one Christian to another, because as Paul wants any true Christian to know, not losing heart, has nothing at all to do with whether or not you are a “better” or “stronger” person.

→ In fact, here in 2 Corinthians, Paul is at his most vulnerable. He reveals more about himself, his own emotions, and what he has gone through than in any of his other writings. At the beginning of the letter he says this: “We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death” (1:8–9).

→ And in chapter 4, just before the words of our text Paul used words like “perplexed,” “struck down,” “afflicted,” and “persecuted.” His life was one of ridicule. He was run out of town, beaten up, whipped, thrown into jail, shipwrecked, and bitten by a snake. He even knows his own death will be one where he will be murdered because of His faith in Jesus.

✘ So, yes, Paul knows. He knows the weight. He knows that all of the earthly evidence in this life says that believing in and committing your life to Jesus is just not worth it.

→ So, how does Paul keep from losing hope? How does he not lose heart? He says it is all because of Christ’s resurrection. In chapter 1:9 Paul says, “We had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.” And in verses 13-14 here in our text: “We also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into His presence.”

You see, the fact that Jesus rose victorious from the dead means it is all worth it. His resurrection is both the reason and the power; both why and the how “we do not lose heart.”

- ✘ When Paul’s name was still Saul and he was arresting and persecuting Christians and throwing them in jail so they would be killed for their faith, it was the resurrected Jesus who appeared to him on the road to Damascus. The risen Christ called out, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And when Paul asked, “Who are you?” The answer was: “I am Jesus.”

→ At that moment the unbeliever Saul died and the believing Christian, Paul came to life. It was Christ’s resurrection that was the basis and the energy for all that Paul did and wrote from that day forward. His entire ministry flowed out of the resurrection. It is the promise of his and our resurrection that led him to say, “We do not lose heart.”

III. Our eternal glory with Jesus outweighs affliction.

- ✘ You see, Paul knows with every ounce of his being what’s coming, because he saw it with his own eyes in Jesus. A final day will come, a day of resurrection of the dead. This is the day when Jesus returns, and just as He rose from the dead, so will Paul; so will you; so will I. We will rise with bodies that are immortal and imperishable. All of our afflictions will be gone; no more tears, no more pain, no more grief, no more failings or frailty. Paul promises that our bodies will be glorified on that Day (Phil. 3:21). So Paul speaks what his heart believes. He proclaims as fact what he knows is to come:

The glory of being in Christ’s resurrected presence for eternity far outweighs the troubles that want to weigh us down today, so that by comparison they really are “slight momentary afflictions” (v.17). This is why “we do not lose heart.”

→ Last Sunday we heard Paul say in verses 8-9 before this text, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”

- ✘ When Paul speaks of Jesus’ resurrection as an “eternal weight of glory”, he is using the picture of a balance scale; one where both sides are perfectly balanced when they are empty. On one side though we have all of our afflictions and griefs; the pressures and stresses we face each day; cancer, broken relationships, etc. so that side drops down and bottoms out because it is all so heavy to bear.

→ But then, when you add Christ’s suffering and death on the other side that pays for and forgives all of our sin, things begin to change so that Jesus’ resurrection, which entirely does away with any and all of earth’s afflictions means that the scale is now bottomed out forever the other way!

→ This is the miracle in verse 16 that Paul wants everyone of us to see, know and take to heart, “Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.” This is a present tense, every-moment-of-every-day power from God working inside of you right now from the moment of your baptism. Later on in 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” And also in Titus 3:5, “[God] saved us...by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”

- ✘ Yes, dear Christians the resurrection power not to lose heart is already working right now inside of you through your baptism. But your baptism didn’t mean that you stop living the Christian life. No, you have been renewed – you are “made new again”! Jesus brought you into His eternal family of the Church to live here and serve here and encourage each other here in our current afflictions; to be reminded every Sunday when you gather to be served by God; to be

strengthened when He feeds you here at the Lord's Table with the true body and blood of Jesus, so that you and I both do not lose heart.

Conclusion

✘ Why not? Because the afflictions we face here and now – they are not eternal! They are not permanent, just as a fabric tent is no comparison to a stone or brick building.

➔ But Jesus' resurrection – that is permanent, eternal and more powerful than any affliction, pressure, problem or pain that this world tries to dump upon us. In 1 Corinthians 15:55, 57 Paul asks, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? ... Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!* "So we do not lose heart." Amen.