

June 9, 2024
Third Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

2 Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1 (Mark 3:20–35; Genesis 3:8–15)

DO NOT LOSE HEART, CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Once upon a time, a fellow said to me: *“You Lutherans preach about Jesus dying on the cross and being raised from the dead, week after week. But I already know that. Why don’t you preach about something more relevant? How does the Bible apply to me today?”* If you look at the big picture, nothing in this world is more relevant than Jesus dying and being raised from the dead to save sinners. This broken sinful world and everything in it, including you and me, is passing away. Nothing is more applicable to a sinner whose days on earth are numbered (cf: Psalm 139:16) than Jesus winning victory over sin, death, and the grave in their stead.

The one who first deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden continues to deceive today. To use Jesus’ words from our Gospel text, the devil is the strong man. (cf: Mark 3:20–25) The strong man wants you to believe that he has all authority over the world. The strong man comes to you with lies, trying to convince you that evil is winning. While he has already deceived the world into believing that Christianity is on the wrong side of history and science, he attacks your body with sickness and disease. He afflicts your mind with depression and doubt. He tries to convince you that your sin is so bad that God will never forgive you. But the truth of the matter is, there’s only one unforgiveable sin, and that’s the sin against the Holy Spirit, which is unbelief. (cf: Matthew 12:31)

Many times it appears that the devil is winning the battle. And sometimes he *does* win some battles – but he has already lost the war. Christ Jesus, the offspring of the woman who was first promised in the Garden, the One who would crush the devil’s head on the cross, (cf: Genesis 3:15) has come into the world and has bound the strongman and plundered His house. With every demon that Jesus cast out in His earthly ministry, it was another rope binding the devil. Every person delivered from demon possession was a former prize of the devil, but now plundered by Jesus from the devil’s house and placed into God’s household of faith.

Christ Jesus has bound the devil by keeping God’s Law perfectly and suffering His entire wrath against all sin in your stead and in mine. In His resurrection, Jesus plundered the strong man’s house, releasing all who trust in Christ from the power of sin, death, and the grave. It was the Son of God doing the will of the Father, reconciling mankind back to the Father. He plundered you out of the strong man’s house in the waters of Baptism, where God planted faith and Holy Spirit in you, forgiving you all your sins, and making you His own child in His household of faith.

Jesus' death and resurrection is indeed, the most relevant thing to sinners. That's why St. Paul didn't preach eloquent sermons to soothe the people's felt needs or to teach them self-help techniques. No. He was called by Jesus Himself to be an apostle, set apart to proclaim Christ and Him crucified. (cf: Acts 9:15–16; 1 Corinthians 2:1–2) As he writes in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says:

"... the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18)

Our epistle text this morning comes from St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthian Christians and to you 21st century Christians. It's a continuation of last week's text where you heard Paul metaphorically call all who trust and believe in Christ Jesus "jars of clay." **You**, fellow believers in Christ, are fragile earthen vessels. **You are** a jar of clay into which God has poured His priceless treasure. (cf: 2 Corinthians 4:5–12) This "jars of clay" imagery depicts the frailty of your mortal nature and the weakness of your flesh.

On the other hand, the priceless treasure which God has poured into you is the Gospel Good News of Christ crucified to save sinners, Him raised from the dead, and all the gifts He has won on your behalf on the cross. God didn't give you His treasure so that you would hide it away on a shelf in the back room somewhere. No. He has filled you with His gifts so that you be spiritually filled so that the life of Jesus be manifested in your bodies into this unbelieving world so that others might come to know the One who desires to fill **their** jar of clay with Christ and His priceless treasure.

To the unbelieving world, it's foolishness to put priceless treasure into weak and fragile jars of clay. But God's chooses what is foolish in the eyes of the world to shame the wise, demonstrating that all power and glory belongs to Him and not to mankind. (cf: 1 Corinthians 1:27–29; 2 Corinthians 4:7) His power is made perfect in weakness. (cf: 2 Corinthians 12:9) And no one knows this better than St. Paul. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes much more about himself, more about his feelings and his personal sufferings than he does in his other letters. At the beginning of this second letter, he writes:

"... we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death..." (2 Corinthians 1:8–9)

Paul paints a painful picture using phrases like: utterly burdened, beyond our strength, the sentence of death. Last week he used words like perplexed, struck down, afflicted, and persecuted. (cf: 2 Corinthians 4:8–10) Once Paul left his life as a persecutor of the Church to be a proclaimer of the Gospel, his life became one of ridicule and suffering. He was jailed, run out of town, stoned, beaten with rods, whipped, three times shipwrecked, and often without food. (cf: 2 Corinthians 11:22–33) Yet he was always ready and willing to suffer... even die for the sake of the Gospel and the Name of Jesus. It's the cost of discipleship... the cost of taking up one's cross and following Jesus. (cf: Matthew 10:38, 16:24)

Even today, God's power is still made perfect in weakness. Martin Luther called it the Theology of the Cross, that victory comes through defeat. That life comes from dying. It's God allowing believers to suffer trials, temptations, and tribulations to free us from trusting in the false god of

self – so that we cling to Christ alone in faith for salvation. Concordia Commentary writer James Bollhagen puts it this way:

“If the faithful are to be distinguished in this life from unbelievers, it will be due to their suffering, since the followers of Christ can expect to be persecuted on account of Christ (e.g., Mt 5:3–12). We are baptized into Christ’s death, and our life will share the cruciform shape of his life.” (Bollhagen, Ecclesiastes, Concordia Commentary, 331)

So how then are you, brothers and sisters in Christ, to survive living day to day as fragile jars of clay in this broken and sinful world that treats you like a bull in a china shop? The devil and the unbelieving world despise Christians, so they do their worst to afflict and confound you, attempting to crush your fragile jar of clay so that you lose heart... so that you either give up, give out, or give in to their temptations.

In our epistle, St. Paul exhorts you to not lose heart but look to the future. The afflictions are short and the glory is eternal. And it’s all because of Christ’s resurrection. He writes:

“¹³ Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.” (2 Corinthians 4:13–14)

Do not lose heart because like St. Paul, you have the same spirit of faith that the Old Testament patriarchs had. Faith is the same in both the Old and New Testaments. Both contain the same truth – the Old in the form of the promise and the New in the form of fulfillment. As Paul quotes David in Psalm 116, both David and Paul are surrounded by enemies. But – neither David nor Paul could remain quiet about their faith in the face of danger. They **had** to speak of the wonderful things they had seen and heard. (cf: Acts 4:20) Faith is not an uncertain hope based upon warm fuzzy feelings but is grounded in the Word of God – knowing that the God who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us into His presence.

The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of your own resurrection. It’s your assurance that you will share in the life of your risen Lord. Just as sure as God raised up Jesus, so too will He raise all who die in Christ on the Last Day. Because Jesus has plundered you out of the strong man’s house in the waters of Baptism, poured into your jar of clay the priceless treasures of the Gospel, faith, and the Holy Spirit, you are enabled to speak boldly in faith of the One who loves you and gave His life to save you.

Paul and the other apostles couldn’t keep quiet about the Gospel. They traveled far and wide and most of them went to their deaths proclaiming the resurrection. Having the priceless treasure of Christ crucified and resurrected within your jar of clay, how can you not tell a dead and dying world about the life that Christ Jesus won for you and all people so that His grace extends to more and more people and increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. (cf: 2 Corinthians 4:15)

Yes, it is true, as I said earlier, you and I cling to faith in Christ and suffer as our outer nature wastes away. (cf: 2 Corinthians 4:16) The best evidence of the great faith of the early Christians is how they were willing to suffer for it. No one would suffer so much and die horrible deaths to

protect a lie. Yet Paul and countless others were killed for their confession of Christ crucified and resurrected from the dead. They could've saved their own necks by renouncing Him. But rather than deny Christ before men, they suffered and died on crosses, in flames, and by the edge of the sword. And why? Because they were certain Jesus had risen from the dead and would also raise them on the Last Day. (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:32)

And today, 2,000 years later, nothing has changed. The devil is still deceiving. The world still hates Christianity. You have faced and will continue to face sufferings that could cause you to lose heart. In Baptism, you were united with Christ, died with Him, and also, must suffer with Him. (cf: Philippians 1:29) In our day, it won't likely be on crosses, by lions, or flames – but by rejection, isolation, and mocking, even from within our own families like our Lord Jesus did. Yes, do not lose heart dear baptized believer. Look to the future. The afflictions are short and the glory is eternal.

Jesus went to the cross for you – knowing that God would raise Him from the dead. His afflictions were anything but light. They were the full wrath and punishment of God for the sins of the whole world. An eternity of sufferings were compressed into just a few hours of time. But His affliction was not forever. God raised Him from the dead.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, do not lose heart. You have been united to Jesus in His death and in His resurrection in the waters of Baptism. Though your outer self is wasting away God renews your inner self right here in Word and Sacrament. All that belongs to this sinful world is temporary and passing away. Look to the things that are unseen and eternal which will be beyond all comparison... the glory of being God's reconciled and restored child, living in His presence forever.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.