

June 16, 2024
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

2 Corinthians 5:1–10

BE OF GOOD COURAGE FOR YOU WALK BY FAITH, NOT MY SIGHT

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

Today is our third Sunday in a row hearing from St. Paul in our epistle reading as he writes his second letter to the Corinthian Christians and you 21st century Christians. (cf: 2 Corinthians 4:5–18) Over the past two weeks we've heard Paul describe how the believer lives in the tension between the “**now**” and the “**not yet**.” Living in the “**now**” means – living right **now** as God's redeemed child for the sake of Christ, possessing the forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation. Living in the “**not yet**” means – how each day we look forward in eager anticipation for Jesus' second coming on the Last Day when He will judge the living and the dead.

Prior to today's text, Paul metaphorically described all who trust and believe in Christ Jesus as fragile “**jars of clay**” into which God has poured His priceless treasure of salvation. 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 – but that you be spiritually filled so that the life of Jesus be manifested in your bodies into this sinful and unbelieving world... that you **share** the Good News of Christ Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead, the only Savior the world will ever know, with your unbelieving family and friends.

Living as fragile jars of clay, the devil and the sinful world wish to crush you, so Paul exhorts you to not lose heart when faced with the afflictions of the world. Living in the “**now**,” your worldly sufferings are light and momentary preparing you for the “**not yet**,” the eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as you look **not** to the things that are seen in the “**now**” but to the “**not yet**,” eternal things that are unseen... the glory of being God's reconciled and restored child, living in His presence forever.

In today's text, Paul continues to unpack this tension between the “**now**” and the “**not yet**,” and as he does, he switches metaphors, from the picture of a jar of clay to that of a tent to illustrate the body and life of the believer. He writes:

"For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Corinthians 5:1)

Your life and earthly existence and the lives of all believers is like a tent. Paul knows all about tents. Formerly a Pharisee and currently an apostle of Jesus, proclaiming Christ and Him crucified to save sinners, from time to time throughout his life, Paul works as a tentmaker to provide for himself. (cf: Acts 18:1–4) He knows that tents are neither strong nor permanent structures. The elements of the weather cause a tent to deteriorate and wear out until it is tattered and blows away.

The human body is much like a tent. At some point in your life and mine, the tent you live in... the body you live in... your earthly home... will be destroyed. "**Destroyed**" is a strong word. Perhaps Paul uses it to refer to all who will be martyred for their confession of Christ. But regardless of the word you use – your earthly body is temporary and one day it will be destroyed by a physical death. But for all who trust and believe in Christ – right now – at this very minute, "**... we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.**"

Did you catch that? Paul said: "**We have...**" The word "**have**" is a present tense verb. It's a present tense reality for all who believe. **We have** a building from God, eternal in the heavens – not made with human hands but by God's own hands. It's yours! It's a permanent, glorious, infinitely blessed existence in heaven for all eternity. When you look at the difference in living in the suffering and affliction of the "**now**" versus the glory of living in the "**not yet**," who doesn't long to put on that heavenly dwelling? While on this earth, living in the temporary tent of your mortal body, you groan, you feel the weight and burden of the sin that is within your flesh. It weighs you down, ages your body, and slows your step. You and I long to put on our heavenly dwelling. But there's a problem. Not everyone gets a glorious, eternal, permanent dwelling. Paul says:

"if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked." (2 Corinthians 5:3)

Over the period of a person's entire life on earth, all who are clothed in the righteousness of Christ in Baptism are further clothed as they continue to trust in Him for salvation. They continue to have their inner self renewed and further clothed day by day by means Word and Sacrament. (cf: 2 Corinthians 4:16; Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14) However, apart from being clothed in the righteousness of Christ the shame of a person's nakedness will appear. All who are apart from Christ, those who don't trust in Him for life and salvation, will not receive a heavenly dwelling but will be found naked and stripped bare of any heavenly glory. When will the righteous be further clothed with their heavenly dwelling and the unrighteous found naked? Paul says it happens:

"... before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." (2 Corinthians 5:10)

No one will escape. It's before this judgment seat that each will either receive a key to a glorious heavenly mansion or will be left naked – all based on what is done in the body, whether good or evil. Now, before you think that Paul is preaching good works righteousness, that mankind can save himself by his works and deeds on earth, let's go back to verse 5 where Paul says:

"He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee." (2 Corinthians 5:5)

Left to our own reason and strength, you and I cannot do good things. But God can – and God does. He has His purposes for all things. He has prepared you for this new heavenly dwelling by sending His Son Christ Jesus to take all your sin and all your evil deeds into His body. He who knew no sin became sin for you. (cf: 2 Corinthians 5:21) Then He conquered that sin within His

body on the cross, so that all that's left for you is your good deeds, and those good deeds are done through the Spirit, who was given to you in Baptism as your guarantee. When God looks at you on Judgment Day – all He sees is Jesus – and all the good deeds the Spirit has done through you and your body, because Christ has taken away the evil deeds in His body.

The Christian life is not a matter of rules and regulations, a list of dos and don'ts. No, it's a faithful response to the love that God has for you in Christ Jesus. It's a faithful response to the Gospel that frees and gives life. It's a response that says: *"Here I am God, send me. Use me in life and in death, in such a way that you are praised of glorified."* In the words of St. Paul

"6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:6–7)

In the waters of Baptism you were given the gift of faith and the Holy Spirit. You now see through eyes of faith. In faith, you see that all of your bad deeds, your sinful and evil deeds, are taken away and put to death in the body of Christ on the cross. Also, in faith, you see that the Spirit is the One who enables you to flee from sinful deeds – and thus works good deeds through your body. And, therefore, in faith you see your heavenly dwelling, that perfect body that's yours right *"now,"* but waiting for you in the *"not yet"* in heaven. Like Paul:

"8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him." (2 Corinthians 5:8–9)

Your life and earthly existence is lived in a metaphorical tent down in a valley. Up on the hill in the distance you can see a mansion a building from God. It's a glorious mansion. You know that it's yours right *now*, but you must wait to move. God has good works to work through you. So, in the meantime, you persevere and live in your tent in the valley of the shadow of death. When the storms of life come through, the wind whips the fabric and tears at the threads, allowing the rain and cold to afflict you in body and soul. Yet you persevere by continuing to have your inner self renewed and by means of Word and Sacrament, knowing that at some point, God will call you to leave your temporary tent and move into His permanent dwelling, eternal in the heavens.

But, before that happens, before you move into that heavenly dwelling, you will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Everyone does, believers and unbelievers alike. Then you will receive what is due to you. And what is due? A permanent heavenly dwelling because Christ has taken away the evil deeds you have done in your body into His perfect body, clothed you with His righteousness so that the Spirit might work good through your body. You do this in response to the love of Him who loved you to death on the cross.

You have God's promise and the guarantee of the Holy Spirit. You live in His assurance and good courage. Because of St. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says that your temporary dwelling, in which you groan, will be replaced by an eternal heavenly dwelling – it will happen. You are of Good Courage because of What Christ Has Done in His Body.

Amen.

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