

June 17, 2012
Pentecost 3

"We Don't Lose Heart Because of Jesus' Resurrection"

2 CORINTHIANS 4:13-18

It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. ¹⁵ All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. ¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

It kept on going and going and going. In 1972 scientists launched the Pioneer 10 satellite to take pictures and provide other information about the planet Jupiter. One year later Pioneer 10 was sending pictures of Jupiter back to earth. The gravitational pull of Jupiter then sent the satellite into outer space at greater speeds. At two billion miles it passed Uranus, three billion it passed Neptune, four billion it passed Pluto. Like the Energizer Bunny it kept on going and going and going. It sent its information for over 30 years with a small 8 watt power transmitter.

The Apostle Paul was a man who kept going and going and going for Jesus. In the words just read to you, we hear him tell us, "We do not lose heart." What kept him going? It was Jesus and his resurrection from the dead allowed him to look at the past and realize his sin was forgiven. The resurrection gave him the power to look at the present and realize Jesus was with him. The resurrection allowed him to look to the future to be raised to life in the place that Jesus has prepared for us.

Here we are on this summer day in June, Father's Day. We share the same resurrection confidence that fueled the life of Paul. Amid all the troubles and difficulties of life we can join him in saying, "We don't lose heart."

We believe therefore we speak

We don't lose heart. We keep going and going because with Paul we can look back and see how we have been rescued from a very terrible situation. Paul uses the words of Psalm 116 to reflect on the amazing rescue that took place in his life. He says, "It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken.' With the same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak." In Psalm 116 the psalmist speaks of being delivered from the cords of death. "The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the Lord; O Lord, save me."

The Apostle Paul never forgot what it was like to be delivered from the cords of eternal death and punishment that were wrapped around him. He had to speak. He wrote,

"Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners of whom I am chief." He thought of himself as the least likely candidate to be rescued by the Lord because he persecuted the church of God. Remember how he was traveling to Damascus to find Christians he could put to death. A bright light knocked him to the ground. A voice cried out, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me." In fear he asks, "Lord, who are you?" The voice spoke to him again, "I am Jesus." Those words "I am Jesus" were life changing. These words delivered him from trusting in himself for his salvation to trusting in Jesus.

We join Paul in saying "We believe, there we speak." With the psalmist we say, "The cords of death entangled me." Some babies are born into this world with the mother's umbilical cord wrapped around their necks. They need to be cut free immediately or they will die. You and I were born with the cords of death wrapped around us. There was no way we could escape being pulled down to eternal death and punishment unless Jesus came to rescue us. With the eyes of faith we believe Jesus did everything necessary to pay for every sin we have committed so we can be free. I cannot see the oxygen that surrounds me in this room, but I know it is there and it is keeping me alive. I cannot see with my physical eyes the death that Jesus died on the cross for my sin and his resurrection, but I see it with eyes of faith and it is real to me, and I want to speak about it.

If you could speak to Paul he would not be ashamed to tell you how the Lord also saved him from numerous tough situations in life. In the earlier part of this chapter he wrote of some of the challenges that faced him in life: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but now abandoned; struck down but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus might be revealed in our bodies." What gave Paul the energy to keep going and boldly confess Jesus' death and resurrection? Paul knew that Jesus was alive and sitting on the right hand of his heavenly. Here is what he wrote as he faced the last days of his life on this earth as a prisoner in Rome: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom."

We believe and therefore we speak. How many times has the risen Lord Jesus rescued you from tough situations that you faced in life? There were some days when you had so little strength that all you could do was cry out to the Lord, "Lord help me" or "Lord give me strength." The Lord delivered you. "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

We have a purpose in life

Paul was able to keep on going in life because he had a purpose. He says that we speak because, "we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence." God will raise us up on judgment day. He will present us to himself as his holy people, his saints and his beloved children who will spend eternity with him because of Jesus. Paul considered it such an honor and privilege to be involved in reaching out to people and bringing them to Jesus so they could be presented before the Lord on judgment day and not condemned to eternal death and punishment.

Why does the Lord leave us here on this earth? What purpose does he have for my life and your life? Early in this chapter Paul wrote, "We always carry about in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." I get to tell people about Jesus and so do you. This past week, we had four children from the Transitional Shelter attending our little Bible study. Could it be the words that we used to explain salvation might lead them to stand with us before the Lord in the final judgment wrapped in beautiful robes of Jesus' righteousness? Already we are receiving registrations for our Bible Camp. Who knows what major impact we might have in the lives of children who are learning about Jesus for the first time or being strengthened in their faith?

I love the way Paul speaks about the meaning and purpose he saw in our lives. "All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God." How can we ever grow weary when we look at what the Lord is doing throughout the world? On this third Sunday in June, the Lord is raising up fathers who are concerned about teaching their children about Jesus. The grace of God is reaching more and more people in these last days. I attended our district convention in Phoenix. Our synod president was there to describe what it was like to worship with our brothers and sisters in Africa. I read through a brochure that was handed out about Partners in China. People from our churches are going to China to teach different subjects such as English and then having opportunities to have informal Bible studies that go under the radar of the communist government. We are even able to distribute Bible study material to people living in the Muslim country of Pakistan. How can we grow weary when the grace of God is reaching more and more people?

We know the best is yet to come

How can we grow weary when we know the best is yet to come? "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." Outwardly we are wasting away. Every thing we touch in life gets older. Your pet dog gets older. Your car gets older. Your house gets older. Your clothes wear out. Your body changes with age. You go through major changes in your life. As we sing in the hymn, "Change and decay in all around I see, Oh Thou who changest not abide with me." Jesus never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is sitting at the right hand of God the Father and his love for you never changes. As we reflect on his love that never change it renews us and refreshes us.

We don't lose heart because through Jesus' resurrection the troubles of this life are light and momentary compared to the glory that will be ours in Jesus. "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." Some people look at the bad things in life that happen to us as having bad luck. Or they may say, "Man, did I ever get slammed" as if God is out to get them. The Lord does allow troubles to come to us. Paul had his share of troubles. The risen Lord and Savior uses these troubles to help you and me stay focused on the glory that he has waiting for us. Romans 8 says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us." I am holding in my hands a rock and a feather. If this rock were pure gold it would far outweigh the feather. The glory that waits for us far outweighs the problems. It helps us to not lose hope.

"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary,

but what is unseen is eternal." I cannot see the air that I am breathing, but I know that God provided this air for me to breathe to keep me alive on this planet we call earth. I cannot see the place Jesus has prepared for me, but I know it is there waiting for me because Jesus our risen Lord and Savior tells us, "I am going to prepare a place for you." Everything you see with your physical eyes is temporary. It won't last. What you see with your eyes of faith lasts forever. The Greek word for "fix your eyes" is the word "skopeo" from which we get our English word "scope" as in microscope and telescope. So we focus or fix our eyes on what is eternal. That leads us to not lose heart. As Peter writes, "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness." This allows us to keep on going and going and going, and not lose heart. Amen.