

Sermon for June 13, 2021

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST -

Ezekiel 17:22–24

2 Corinthians 5:1–10 (11–17)

Mark 4:26–34

I want to tackle the Epistle lesson today, because I find it a bit chewy, if you know what I mean. And since our Gospel lesson ends with these words.

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

I wanted to examine St. Paul's metaphors here and try to put them into more digestible language...

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 5:1–17

1 We know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

There are three possibilities here.

1. St. Paul is referring to our literal HOME, earthy dwellings compared to eternal dwellings
2. St. Paul is referring figuratively to our temporal bodies, with all their inherent weaknesses in contrast to our glorified bodies we will have in the eternal kingdom.
3. St. Paul is allowing BOTH interpretations, as BOTH also work here.

**Since I get really irritated with the "Both/And" solution (which I sometimes call the Lutheran cop-out) I'm willing to accept it, only if we can agree that ONE of these solutions is probably "more correct."*

I prefer solution 2, precisely because it is figurative, and so far Paul has been employing metaphorical language. It would seem odd to move to a literal meaning for this one idea, especially since the rest of the paragraph is clearly back in metaphor.

2 For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling,

Notice it says "put on" as in to be "dressed in"... Our bodies are subject to all kinds of weakness, subject to stresses and pains, physical, mental and spiritual. Naturally we long for the comfort of a body that is not subject to weakness and decay.

3 if indeed by putting it on (this heavenly dwelling) we may not be found naked.

"Nakedness" and thus exposure, must relate in such a manner to unrighteousness in Paul's metaphor.

And at some point in the "heavenly" future, we will found clothed in righteousness. (That is, not of *our* doing.)

4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

We will not get our heavenly bodies until sometime later (after we die). In the meantime we are “still in our sins and weaknesses” And so we groan, under this burden of Sin. But, in some sense we are both unclothed and clothed, in that we HAVE this promise ‘guaranteed’ to us NOW. We have a righteousness of a sort, so in that sense we are not completely “unclothed”, but as we will see in the next verse we also have the Spirit, even now. St. Paul even says this, using that word, guarantee...

5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

This righteousness comes from God and it is consistent with what St. Paul writes to the Romans in Chapter 3 ROM 3: 21ff *“But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, as attested by the Law and the Prophets. And this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

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.

St. Paul writes this in the indicative mood, stating it as a fact, rather than to frame this in the subjunctive mood which would make this a mere wish, desire, or possibility. The difference it makes is THIS... Since we have this Spirit... we ARE courageous... not we should be or we ought to be... WE ARE NOW, not sometime in the future, but HERE and NOW. And not “brave” like the little Pomeranian on a leash, walking with its master, unconcerned and willing to bark aggressively at a large Husky dog on a chain...all because their master was right there to protect them. No, we have courage, even though our Master is unseen. Because we walk by faith, not sight.

8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

“Mark you, we would RATHER be at HOME in the presence of our God, than walking this “dangerous” world by faith... Never-the-less we are brave in spite of the world around us. Because we KNOW this world will not last.

9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

In other words, we live like we are already *there*. And what we do here is attempt to live the life we imagine we will be living there... I say imagine because we don't really know what life will be like in heaven with our Lord, other than it will be GOOD. SO, as we are NOT AWAY, but at home in the body, we set our focus on the Lord of hosts. We are servants. We aim to please.

I like that description -- aim to please -- because it reminds us to be content and pleasant. We can afford to be NICE and KIND because it costs us nothing. And it makes

living in this world a bit more bearable, not only for ourselves, but for everyone else. I like it also because St. Paul uses the word for “AIM” and we are to do our best to “hit the mark.” It’s not a coincidence that the word for SIN comes from the same word... only in that case it means to MISS the mark. And I think that what St. Paul wants us to think about is that *Righteousness is like archery*...It takes practice to HIT the mark. It takes lots of practice to hit it consistently. But THIS earthly body is prone to weakness, as is our earthly mind... We get tired, bored, irritable and other things... and so we will miss the mark from time to time. The Good News is that there is *forgiveness*.

10 For we must all appear 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.

Before we move on to the gospel, St. Paul is going to remind us that there is STILL JUDGEMENT. And we will be judged. We will stand before the judgement seat and be held accountable for the good things as well as our sins... I think it will surprise us to learn what we did and didn’t do.

11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.

This “call to action” will serve as the crux of the sermon... “Since we have knowledge of both God’s good grace and God’s righteous judgement, we SPEAK to what we know. I was reminded by this lesson of the story of the Emperor’s New Clothes, because I had this image of this Invisible robe of Christ’s righteousness that covers us in the here and now. God sees it because it is spiritual. But none of *us* can see it, except as evidence of how we live and serve in the Kingdom of heaven, as it exists more the moment, here on earth. And because we are yet sinners, it often looks to the world like we have no clothes, no righteousness. And that’s often because we do not act with the fruits of the spirit.

On the other hand, the story is also applied to us in this way...In the tale by Hans Christian Anderson, his purpose was to tell a different story, the story of how people can become self-deluded, filled with pride and unwilling to speak the truth that is obvious to those who have eyes to see. If you recall the story, two scoundrels who claim to make the finest clothing in the world, enter the capital city of an emperor who spends lavishly on fashion at the expense of state matters. Posing as weavers, they offer to supply him with magnificent clothes that are invisible to those who are stupid or incompetent. The emperor hires them, and they set up looms and go to work. A succession of officials, and then the emperor himself, visit them to check their progress. Each sees that the looms are empty but pretend that they can see the fabrics so that they do not appear to be fools. Finally, the weavers report that the emperor's suit is finished. They mime dressing him and he sets off in a procession before the whole city. The townsfolk uncomfortably go along with the pretense, not wanting to appear inept or stupid themselves, until a simple child blurts out what is obvious to everyone... that the emperor isn’t wearing any clothes at all. The people then realize that everyone has been fooled. And although startled, the emperor continues the procession, walking more proudly than ever.

The point I'm making is this, that so many people are afraid to speak up about what they know is true, simply because they don't want to appear foolish, inept, or incompetent to others. And that goes to speaking up for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And yet here, we are told that we are filled with the courage to do so.

It kind of reminds me of the Story of Gideon...

The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."

The greeting is ripe with irony, calling Gideon "Mighty Warrior" ... At that moment he is threshing wheat in the wine press. Why is that a big deal? Because you don't thresh wheat in a wine press. A wine press is at the bottom of a hill, usually in the valley, because it's much easier to carry grapes down hill. You thresh wheat on the *top* of the hill, where the wind can blow away the chaff. The problem is that your enemies can see you when you are on top of the hill. There might not be any wind in the wine press, and so the work would be hot and dirty. But at least you won't get attacked... maybe. Mighty warrior indeed.

But God has a way of calling people with names to live up to... Like Abraham and Matthew and Paul.

And like YOU. Courageous in the Spirit of the Lord. Therefore the motive is to serve, and persuade... SHARE The gospel

And so let's jump to the end and let these last few verses serve as our conclusion... Since in these sentences St. Paul is clearly SHARING the Gospel.

14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. 16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

AMEN