

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Thesis of Series

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. (2 Corinthians 4:7)

- Prayer
- Happy Father's Day

Sermon

Over the last couple of weeks we've been going through a portion of the book of 2 Corinthians. In this letter, Paul is, again, defending his apostleship against the so-called "super apostles." They were a sophisticated lot who spoke with eloquence and attracted a lot of attention. They claimed a better gospel than Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy and successfully cast doubt on Paul's authority. Paul seemed to them to be quite unsuccessful and the Corinthians weren't as impressed with his message as they once had been. Paul spends a good bit of time defending his apostleship in 2 Corinthians, not from a place of weakness and insecurity. He makes clear that the validity of his message is not dependent on his eloquence, good looks, or perceived success--but upon the "glory of Christ, who is the image of God (4:4)." It is that very glory that is housed in jars of clay and so Paul's point to the Corinthians is that what they perceive with their eyes cannot reflect the glory of the gospel.

Last week, Fr. Michael left us with the end of chapter 4 and reminded us that we, too, though crushed under the great weight of the world, have this same treasure in jars of clay and that no "light momentary affliction" can compare to the eternal weight of glory for which we await. But at this point, an important question emerges:

- How is the gospel good news if it is only renewing my inward man and not my whole self?

I think this is the very question Paul anticipates as he moves into chapter 5. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 5:1-10...

¹ 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.

Paul changes metaphors on us here a bit. In 4:7 he referred to our bodies as “jars of clay.” Now he likens our bodies to tents or “earthly houses.” Instead of talking about the eternal weight of glory, he talks about a “building from God” and “a house not made with hands.” Why does he do this? I think it is because he is well aware of his previous point. He had just told the Corinthians that his earthly body--their earthly body--was wasting away, but that his inward man was being renewed day by day. Paul is well aware of the tendency for human beings to see themselves as a composite of parts, and not only this but to neglect one of our parts--perhaps our inner man--to pamper another--such as the body. Paul is anticipating the question:

How is the gospel good news if it is only renewing my inward man and not my whole self?

The renewal of our inner being can certainly be glorious. Have you ever stopped to think about how rotten of a person you would be if your inward being wasn't being renewed every day? But if we glance at our prayers of the people, we know that we are much more than inward beings. We pray for our sisters with cancer. We pray for our brother in prison. We pray for our pregnant mothers and babies. Why? Because we are more than our inward being, we are bodies, too.

Paul calls these bodies tents and contrasts them with an eternal house, a mansion. This is important because he does not say “if our tent is destroyed, we didn't need it anyway.” That would be to say that if our bodies are destroyed, we don't need a body. No! He says we have a better house. This is why he says in verses 2-3:

² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³ if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked.

I remember lying awake late at night as a child contemplating what a life in heaven must be like. I tried with all my might to get excited about it. Hymns made it sound so great, but I couldn't imagine a life without BMX bikes, skateboards, hamburgers, and waffles. I was trying to imagine an existence without a body. I thought that when human beings died, our spirits or souls were separated from our bodies for eternity. I didn't understand that what I was trying to imagine is what Paul calls here "being found naked." I didn't understand how far from God's intentions such an existence was. I would have been so relieved to hear Paul say—

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.

"Not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed. Paul's language of being clothed and unclothed refers to our "earthly tent," our "jars of clay." This would have been a great relief to me as a child. Indeed, it is a great relief to me today, and I hope a great cause for joy for each of you. As we groan in these bodies, as we grow old and ache. As the weight of the world takes its toll on us. As our hearts grow weary of disappointment, shame, anxiety, fear—fill in the blank here—it may be tempting to want to be done with it all. We might say with the prophet Jonah, "It would be better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:8). I know you are weary, brother. I know you are tired, sister. I know that the weight of the world hangs heavy on us all. But what you want is not to be freed from your body, not to be, as Paul says, naked or unclothed, but to be further clothed! Your heavenly father never intended the weight that is pressing down on each of us. He has made us for something else, something better. The good news of Jesus Christ is not just that your inward man is being renewed,

but your entire being will be redeemed, inner man and outer man. Soul, spirit, AND Body! This is not an accident. This is not some fringe benefit of the gospel, but part of God's entire intention for humanity. This is so much the case, that your suffering, the weight you are bearing in your body this morning, is the preparation of this very good news! Look at verse 5:

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

You are being prepared for this very thing! What very thing? The resurrection of the body! We confess this every week together. "I believe in the resurrection of the body." You see, God's purpose is to renew our entire being. This is why the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so important. Without the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, you have no gospel. The whole point of Jesus' incarnation was to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Let me repeat that: the whole point of Jesus' incarnation was to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He lived a sinless life; we couldn't do that. He atoned for the sins of mankind; we couldn't do that. He rose from the grave; we couldn't do that either. But none of this gives us much hope without the promise of our own physical, bodily resurrection from the dead. This is precisely the promise we have in Christ's resurrection. I don't know about you, but as great as forgiveness is, I want that resurrected body! Why? Because I want to experience God's good, good creation as he made me to experience it. Why else would Paul say "God has prepared us for this?" To experience his good creation, unadulterated, in our heavenly tents--that is our resurrected bodies--is what Paul means when he calls the mortal being swallowed up by life. Just as Jesus had said:

*...I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.
(John 10:10)*

So, how is the gospel good news if it is only renewing my inward man and not my whole self? The answer is that this gospel housed in jars of clay renews, not just your inner being, but your entire being.

Let continue with verses 6-9:

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. 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.

So it doesn't matter to Paul what the Corinthians think. It doesn't matter what those "super-apostles" say about his perceived lack of success. It doesn't matter what others say or think about you. It doesn't matter whether we appear successful or not. God has given us a down payment, the guarantee of His Holy Spirit--that inward renewal wrought by the Comforter, that sanctification that takes place so subtly and slowly, that gradual preparation going on in your inward being, that's barely a glimpse, a taste of what is to come. No one can see it. No one can perceive it. To the world we look like fools in our prayers, Bible readings, sacraments, and preaching. But that's just it--that's what it *looks* like. But Paul knew that looks are deceiving and that beauty fades, "for we walk by faith, not by sight."

Now all of this resurrection sounds great, I know, but Paul ends our passage this morning with a very sobering reality:

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.

Why does Paul bring up judgment all of a sudden? Again, I think Paul is anticipating another question:

If our outer being will not be renewed until our bodies are resurrected from the dead, does it matter what we do in the body?

Paul's answer is, Yes! Because each of us will undergo judgment. Each of us will have to answer for our actions "done in the body." Why? For the same reason Paul started talking about our resurrection at the beginning of chapter 5. You are not a composite of parts. You are a whole being. This is why death is so tragic. The body is not supposed to be separated from the soul. The New Testament does indicate that there is an interim period of conscious presence with the Lord between our death and resurrection, but the separation of body and soul is proof of the Fall's corruption, not evidence that the body is somehow incidental to our existence. In other words, we can't have it both ways. We can't long for a bodily resurrection while at the same time live as though what we do in the body doesn't matter. This is why Paul reminds us of the judgment seat of Christ. And this is why Paul says "whether we are at home or away we make it our aim to please him." It matters what we do in the body. We will be judged for it.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. (2 Cor. 4:7)

Don't despair of your jars of clay. They are the very thing holding the treasure of the gospel. They are the temples of the Holy Spirit. They weren't designed to carry the weight of the world. Yes, they are cracked. Yes, they are saddened. Yes, they ache and bend. But God's surpassing power is at work in you. As you step out of this sanctuary this morning, as your heavy feet plod down the hill to your car, remember, there is a promise that you cannot see with your eyes, but only by faith. A promise that your entire being will be remade and we know this because Jesus Christ has risen from the grave, and though he will come again to judge the living and the dead, he has promised:

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if

I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. John 14:1-3