

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 6-B)

Lessons for the Day: Ezekiel 17:22-24; 2 Corinthians 5:1-17; Mark 4:26-34**A Homeward Look**

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

“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. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. 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. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 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.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

This past week was a sad week for several families of our congregation, as we had the funeral services for three of our members who entered into the glory of eternal life in heaven. It was my responsibility, but more correctly, it was my honour and privilege, to conduct the funeral services and to lead people to the hope that is ours in the living Lord Jesus Christ. What a blessing it is to be able to approach these times of loss, as difficult as they may be for those loved ones who mourn the loss of a dear spouse or parent or friend, and to share the good news of the resurrected Lord. Even as we see the inescapable judgement of sin in each and every death, God’s people also believe in and find comfort in the promises that God has made known to us in the Saviour who died for us and rose again, and who declares so gloriously to us: *“Because I live, you also will live.”* (John 14:19, ESV)

In a world that is so filled with uncertainty, with decay and with loss, it is so good for us to have the comfort of Paul’s words to us today. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul is able to assure us: *“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.”* Even as we cling to the life we have in this world, and find it hard to imagine any other life, the truth is that we are still away from our Lord, our God, our Saviour. We just sang in the hymn, *“I’m but a stranger here, heaven is my home”* (LSB 748), and so we lift our eyes and our hearts in a homeward look, as we rejoice and remember that God has prepared a glorious home for us, that wonderful, perfect home of heaven.

If you do any travelling on the weekends, you can’t miss the large number of RVs that are on the road. Many people have been waiting all winter for these nicer days when they go camping or to the cabin for the weekends. For some people, camping means pitching a tent, with no luxuries like running water or electricity. For others it may be simple tent-trailers or fully equipped campers. Some RVs are small, luxury homes. In the same way, there are those who have rustic cabins, and there are those whose cabins are simply second homes. While I’m not into sleeping on the ground anymore, or having to dig my own latrine, I don’t mind staying in a comfortable hotel room for a few days. But whether it is a tent, a camper, a hotel, a dorm room or a military barracks, it isn’t the same as being at home. Even those who may enjoy spending the entire summer travelling and living in their camper will find that there is a time we long for home—for that place we think of as our permanent abode.

Paul would not have known anything about fancy recreational vehicles or luxury cabins, but his point still applies. No matter how luxurious our living accommodations may be, we really are living in a leaky tent. Now to be clear, Paul is not talking about a place in which we live. He is talking about the tent that is our body. He is talking about the life we live in this sinful world. Life in this tent can be wonderful, relaxing and joyful. But in this world of sin, life has more than its share of problems and woes. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a poem in 1842 called, “The Rainy Day”. It has the famous line: “Into each life some rain must fall”, meaning that everyone will experience difficulty and heartache at some point. The full quote is: “Thy fate is the common fate of all, Into each life some rain must fall, Some days must be dark and dreary.”

Paul understood this long before Longfellow wrote that poem. His own life had more than its share of struggles, pains and losses. The Lord speaks of Paul and says: *“he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”* (Acts 9:15-16, ESV) Paul can recount the suffering in his life: *“Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own*

people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches." (2 Corinthians 11:25–28, ESV) Add to this the fact that he also says: *"So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited."* (2 Corinthians 12:7, ESV) We don't know what that thorn in the flesh was, but it definitely was a struggle for Paul. Life isn't always easy. It isn't always fair. When my children would complain about having to do chores or about being denied some privilege because they were being disciplined, I would tell them, "Life is tough. Then you die." That is what sin, including our sin, has brought into this world. If all we could say about life is that it is tough and comes to an end, how sad this mortal existence would truly be!

Thankfully, God tells us so much more in His Word. Life in this world may be like living in a leaky tent, but we have a home in heaven. Paul says that *while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened*. But he also assures us: *we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*. This home is not under construction. It is already finished and completely furnished. We can be sure of this heavenly home, for God declares in our text: *He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee*. You can be sure that when the time comes, you will move into the heavenly home because the deposit has already been made.

This, my dear people, loved by God, is the hope that I was able to share with the families in the face of loss this week. In all our struggles, fears and uncertainties—yes, even in the face of death itself, we know that God has prepared something better for us. It doesn't mean that everything in this life will be perfect. This earthly tent still leaks. We still have to deal with things like cancer and MS and Parkinson disease. We still have heart problems and all the aches and pains and weaknesses that catch up with us more and more as we age. We have to deal with the water crisis, with family crises and with work problems. For God's people, living in this fallen world, we also face the persecution and hatred of those who think that our faith in the True God somehow poses a threat to their own view of life.

In this letter to the church in Corinth, Paul speaks several times of the comfort and hope that God's people need for this earthly life. Just a few verses before our text, he assures these dear saints that *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* (2 Corinthians 4:6, ESV) It is this confidence, this knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ that enables us to be of good courage through all the changing scenes of life. By the grace of God, this was the hope that I spoke at all the funerals this week. It is the hope that I pray I continue to bring to you in each and every sermon. It is the hope of that everlasting home in heaven. It is the hope of our victory in Jesus Christ. While we live in this earthly tent we will have to struggle with the pains that sin brings into this world. Yet we look homeward, knowing that we have a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ who left that glorious home of heaven to live among us in our leaky tents. He faced the rain that falls into our lives. He faced the storms, the pains and even the death that we must face in this world. In that earthly tent He lived the life we are supposed to live, but don't. And in that earthly tent He took all of our sin and shame upon Himself. He suffers and dies in our place on the cross, and in His resurrection from the dead He gives us the deposit of the life that we will have with Him forever.

It is this wonderful hope of our forgiveness and life in Christ that enables us to go on in these leaky tents, because we look homeward and know what awaits us. As our text says: *So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight*. As the Spirit works faith in our hearts, we look homeward in confidence. So many do not have that hope. We see so many who cannot see beyond this world of suffering and pain. That is one reason why so many, in their despair and emptiness give in to the idea of medical assistance in dying. No one likes pain. No one likes feeling the futility or burden of this world. But as we walk by faith, we look homeward, knowing what God has in store for us. We await God's timing, knowing that this mortal existence will be swallowed up by the life that God gives us as His people.

That life is being enjoyed by those saints whose time in these leaky tents has been brought to an end by the Lord. This is the home that is ours by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, too. In every changing scene of life we lift our eyes and we look homeward. We know we are strangers here, and that our real home is a permanent home of glory and beauty in heaven. It is this confidence that leads Paul to say: *Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him*. Living for the Lord now, we await the day when we will be set free and living in the glorious home He has prepared for us forevermore. Amen.