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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, June 10, 2018
3rd Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 10/Proper 5/Year B
Primary Text: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1
Sermon Title: “Our Employment is with the Kingdom of God”

Theme

Life in the present is transitory and cannot compare with the eternal home God has prepared for us. So we do not despair no matter what life might bring because we know that as God raised Jesus from the dead, God promises to bring us into eternal life.

Text

¹³Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—“I believed, and so I spoke”—we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

^{5:1}For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Sermon

As mentioned last weekend, I am preaching a short four-week sermon series on the Second Readings from Second Corinthians and this will be the second in the series.

Both of the letters to the Corinthians that survived and are part of the canon of the New Testament are written by the Apostle Paul. As I mentioned last week, Paul as Saul was over-zealous for the LORD, the God of Israel and Judaism. And so he led the first persecution of the Christians, but not as mere sport. No, Saul wanted to purify Judaism and he saw Christianity as an impure splinter group of Judaism and if he could just squash it, Judaism would be safe. Saul as Paul after his conversion, never lost any of that intensity, but after his conversion all his energies were spent convincing people of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Long before Paul visited Corinth, it was the capital city (so to speak) of the Achaian League, a federation of cities that aligned themselves to defend against a possible challenge made by Macedonia, Sparta, or Rome. However, that Achaian League was eventually conquered by Rome in 146 BCE and as punishment, Corinth was reduced to rubble. But then seeing the value of controlling such an important trade center, Julius Caesar, rebuilt Corinth as a Roman colony in 44 BCE.

Nearly a hundred years later, the Apostle Paul probably began his ministry with Corinth around 51 CE and by that time Corinth was already a "boom town" of nearly 100,000 people. That meant the community was rife with a population that was wealthy, status conscious, and devoted to rhetoric, and physical appearance. Imagine Malibu, or Hollywood – beautiful people with so much money that they spend all their time arguing with each other.

I hope you remember from last week, that I told you that First Corinthians was likely not Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. It is at least the second one, but the first one, known as Letter A did not survive. And there is reason to believe that another letter was written after what we know as First Corinthians and that letter is known as Letter C and it also did not survive.

And I also hope you remember that I told you that Paul's relationship with the Corinthians was contentious. But this is why we can love both Paul and the Corinthians: Paul was not going to let the devil win by just taking the obstinance of

the Corinthians as the last word and simply walking away and leaving them to their own devices. No, Paul took their personal abuse as part of his calling and simply would not leave them alone. Paul knew from his own personal experience that God revealed in Jesus Christ loved him and was able to forgive him for persecuting his followers, and he was going to bring that same message to anyone who would listen.

Now, let us move to the passage we have at hand.

This passage is a continuation of the passage we had last week. Paul began this passage by writing what I just said; that though he thought he was serving the LORD by persecuting those who departed from the orthodox faith of Judaism, he had been tricked by the devil into thinking his zealousness was godly. Think about it; it must have been nasty business, but the devil had convinced him that what he was doing was, in fact, for the LORD.

I am sure that has never happened to you. But I want to tell you what I was told upon entering seminary. God gives us priorities in God's order not our own. By the time I entered seminary I was married and the father of two. So according to the teaching of the seminary faculty, that priority was not to change because of my sense of call. I was still supposed to love my wife and honor my marriage, and love and nurture my children. That is who I was as I entered ordained ministry and any church that would consider calling me needs to know that up-front. It is part of who I am as a creation of God.

Here is the point, the devil is an expert at causing chaos in the lives of God's people by convincing us that what we need to do is "God's work." But God is a God of order.

- God revealed in Jesus Christ calmed the stormy seas,
- brought sanity to Legion, the man with many demons,
- brought wholeness to the sick and suffering,
- brought Mary and Martha's brother, Lazarus, back to life, and so on.

The title of this sermon is, "Our Employment is in the Kingdom of God." We work for God and if you feel God calling you to do something that is a complete

interruption to your life and the natural order of things, seek the LORD some more. You could be wrong.

The Apostle Paul's employment was in the kingdom of God and as such he was singularly focused. He wanted to tell others about the radical love of God revealed in Christ Jesus, and was unwilling to be distracted by the rebelliousness and defiance of the Corinthians.

In verses 15-18, Paul referred to his own sufferings, trials, and distress as he preached the Good News. It was as if he was telling them, "You Corinthians don't like me telling you how to live the life of a disciple. Well, I don't care if you don't like it. You can beat me and talk smack about me, argue with me or ignore me. I don't care, because I work for one, the Lord Jesus Christ, who loves you enough that he has given me the burden of not letting go of you to your own peril. And one day the suffering I have endured for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ will be traded in for the crown of righteousness won for me, not by anything I've done, but by what Christ has done for me. And the same can be true for you."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I doubt any of you are as ornery as the members of the Corinthian church were. But Paul's writing here is just as meaningful to us as it was to them.

You are baptized children of God and as such, you have been given grace upon grace. Too much will not be asked of you. And whatever worldly pleasures we might have to trade for the life of being a disciple of Jesus Christ will be worth the reward.

In the last part of this passage for today, Paul wrote as if the Corinthians were one *with him* in the life of discipleship even though we know the relationship was antagonistic. He wrote,

¹⁶So *we* do not lose heart. Even though *our* outer nature is wasting away, *our* inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing *us* for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because *we* look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

5:1 For *we* know that if the earthly tent *we* live in is destroyed, *we* have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Eight times Paul wrote forms of *us* and *we*, meaning that he was with them in their common struggle against the devil and his evil ways. And through the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus was with them too, and continues to be with us as we continue on the journey of faith.

You know, there are times when I read Paul's letters and I get the impression he is an arrogant windbag. And then I read a passage like that and I find myself admiring him. He was on a path to certain destruction and the LORD called him and gave him a godly job to do, and that made all the difference. He knew his employment was with the kingdom of God and so he shifted all his energy to pleasing God, without regard for his own needs.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

My Raisin' the Bar Challenge for you this week is to take the bulletin home with you and re-read this Second Reading as a part of your daily devotions. Reflect on it and ask yourself if there is anything in your life that your employer Jesus Christ would want you to shed so that you can be a more effective employee of the kingdom of God. And then pray that he gives you the strength to shed it. Whatever you have to give up now will be worth it in the eternity that awaits you.

Prayer

Lord God, we give you thanks for the saints of every time and place, especially with give you thanks for the Apostle Paul and his enduring legacy of tenacity in the face of conflict. Inspire us to be so bold that we might be used for Kingdom purposes. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen