

## HEARTS REFRESHED BY HOPE

Sermon for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 2018

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Second Reading from before, 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1: <sup>13</sup> **Furthermore, since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what Scripture has said, “I have believed and therefore I have spoken,” we also believe and therefore we speak,** <sup>14</sup> **because we know that the One who has raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and will make us stand before Him with you.** <sup>15</sup> **For all things are for your benefit, that God’s grace may spread to more and more people and may cause thanksgiving to increase greatly, to the glory of God.** <sup>16</sup> **That is why we are not discouraged. Rather, even though our outward person is wasting away, our inward person is being renewed day by day.** <sup>17</sup> **For our light and momentary trouble is producing for us an utterly extraordinary and eternal weight of glory.** <sup>18</sup> **We do not look at the things that are seen but at the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal.** <sup>5:1</sup> **For we know that, if the earthly tent in which we live is demolished, we have a house from God, not made by human hands, eternal in heaven.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Discouragement is a part of everyday life. Last Sunday we heard the Apostle Paul say that “*in every way we are hard-pressed but not crushed. We are perplexed but not in despair,*” (2 Cor. 4:8). Paul knew what discouragement was all about, and we too, can be easily discouraged. In fact, it’s not that hard. Take a look at the parched land – that’s discouraging, especially if you make a living as a farmer. Look at the increased cost of living, how expensive fuel and electricity and groceries are today. Look at our society and see how people of privileged positions, and even in the church, rejoice at the legalisation of such things as gay ‘marriage.’ Even in our own families, we see the breakdown of Christian values as more and more find time to do all sorts of things in their lives but couldn’t be bothered to know or be involved in the life of the church.

Such discouragement. Yet none of this should surprise us though, for Satan is determined to regain us for his kingdom of darkness. It should be of no surprise either to learn that pastors, like the Apostle Paul himself, become discouraged too, for they are also human, who make plenty of mistakes which come with regret. This explains why, in our Second Reading for today, Paul reminds the Corinthians, and us, that in times of discouragement, Christian hope refreshes our hearts.

First, we can have hope because it is based upon the past.

Paul says, <sup>13</sup> **Furthermore, since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what Scripture has said, “I have believed and therefore I have spoken,” we also believe and therefore we speak,** <sup>14</sup> **because we know that the One who has raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus.** Jesus death and resurrection give us hope because He has made complete payment for our sins. Today’s First Reading describes how God promised that the woman’s Seed would crush Satan’s head. The LORD God said, <sup>15</sup> *“I shall make you and the woman hostile to each other and shall make your descendants and her Descendant hostile to each other. He will **crush** your head and you will crush His heel,”* (Gen. 3:15). The snake’s crushed head spells defeat. As it was through the woman that Satan brought sin and death into the world, so it was through the woman’s offspring that God would conquer sin, death, and Satan. *“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work,”* John says (1 John 3:8). Jesus accomplished this by His death and resurrection, and it is in Christ’s death and resurrection that we have been baptised. Paul says that through Baptism we were buried with Jesus into death *“in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life,”* (Rom. 6:4). Christ’s death and resurrection were the basis of the righteousness that the Father credited to us to make us children of God, fit for His kingdom. Through holy Baptism, in which we died to sin and rose to new life, we are now a part of God’s family.

Second, our hope is not only based on the past, but it focuses on the future.

Paul says, **“We know that the One who has raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and will make us stand before Him with you.”**

Our eventual death and the Second Advent of our Lord do not fill us with fear, for we know it will be the beginning of our eternal life in heaven. While our Christian faith takes seriously both temporal blessings and temporal problems, our hope ultimately focuses on the next life. Death means resurrection. The same God and Father who raised Jesus will raise those who belong to Him. Christ is *“the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep,”* (1 Cor. 15:20). More will follow. *“Because I live,”* Jesus says, *“you also will live,”* (John 14:19).

The sad truth for unbelievers is that there is no hope for the future. For them, life is a “dead-end street,” and the death of a loved one is a time for inconsolable grief. People without hope grieve in a way that shows they have no comfort. At best they might cling to some fond memories of their departed loved one. Or comfort may be sought in conducting a grand funeral with an expensive coffin and dozens of beautiful flower arrangements.

We are not saying that Christians don’t grieve, of course we are saddened at the passing of a loved one, but we do not grieve like the rest of men.<sup>1</sup> Of course there is sorrow at a death - one cannot part even for a short time from a loved one without some sad feelings. But we do not grieve without hope because Jesus has promised that His resurrection means we also will rise from death.

Our hope of eternal life is the *focal point* of our Christian faith. The Apostles’ Creed ends with the declaration, “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” Without this hope, Christianity is of no value. Paul himself says, “*If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied,*” (1 Cor. 15:19).

This hope has a solid foundation.<sup>2</sup> Saint Peter refers to our faith as a “*living hope,*” (1 Peter 1:3). This is not some pious wish, but a solid promise of God. This hope gives life. When we, as Christians living in a hostile world are painfully aware of what is being taken away from us, and it could be such things as freedom, dignity, health, or money, it is comforting to remember which treasures cannot be taken from us, namely, the mercy of God, the new birth of Holy Baptism, and the heavenly inheritance that cannot perish, spoil, or fade away. The stock market may crash; buildings burn down; banks may fail; doctors may fail; businesses may fail; the love of family members may fail; but the good things that Christ gives will never fail because they are based on irreversible historical fact - Christ’s resurrection from the dead. He lives; and because He lives, hope lives too.

That hope does not ride up and down like stock prices on Wall Street. That hope is valuable because it is derived not from our achievements but from God’s; it is God’s gift of love, not something He sells us or owes us. And so, the eternal life that God promises is kept in heaven for you, and in the meantime, He shields you. This is in complete contrast to a hope that is wishfully “whistling in the dark.”

Finally, our hope is evident in our daily lives.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:13

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

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Paul says, <sup>15</sup> **For all things are for your benefit, that God's grace may spread to more and more people and may cause thanksgiving to increase greatly, to the glory of God.** <sup>16</sup> **That is why we are not discouraged. Rather, even though our outward person is wasting away, our inward person is being renewed day by day.** <sup>17</sup> **For our light and momentary trouble is producing for us an utterly extraordinary and eternal weight of glory.** <sup>18</sup> **We do not look at the things that are seen but at the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal.**

As long as we keep our eyes fixed on Christ, we Christians will be optimistic about the future, for we know that the "bottom line" is eternal life in Christ. Though we live in the visible world, our focus is on **things that are not seen**. The Nicene Creed ends, "I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."

The ministry of the church enables us to glorify God in our lives as daily our hearts are refreshed with the hope of heaven. We gather around Word and Sacrament where we receive the forgiveness of sins. Together with "*angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we adore and magnify God's glorious name.*" When we leave God's house of worship, we are refreshed as we go out into a hostile world, knowing just how close heaven and earth have come during our short time worshipping in the Lord's presence. We hope and look to that day when our faith will be turned to sight.

Because our hearts are refreshed by the hope of heaven, **that is why we are not discouraged**. We who believe in Christ keep smiling in spite of troubles in life. This does not mean that our troubles are not real and painful. But instead of "crying on the inside and laughing on the outside," as many people do, we Christians do the reverse. **Even though our outward person is wasting away, our inward person is being renewed day by day** through the living hope we have in the living Christ.

There is no comparison between our present heartaches and the glory of eternal life. You could not balance them against each other on scales, <sup>17</sup> **for our light and momentary trouble is producing for us an utterly extraordinary and eternal weight of glory**. The word translated "**trouble**" is a form of the same word Paul used back in verse 8 of this same Letter where he said that we are "*hard-pressed*." The word has in it the idea of pressure. Normally we associate pressure with heaviness. The expressions "the weight of responsibility" and "the pressure of responsibility," for example, are almost synonymous. But Paul talks about the pressures, or troubles, of life as being "**light**," even when the kind of trouble he experienced in Asia was so severe he thought he was going to die. And he calls these pressures "**momentary**,"

even though in the previous verses he had twice used the word “*always*”<sup>3</sup> to describe the duration of the persecution he faced.

Paul can call his troubles “**light and momentary**” because he looks forward to something that makes them appear light and momentary by comparison. He looks to the glory that awaits him when Jesus returns. That glory will not be “**momentary**” but “**eternal.**” And it far outweighs any troubles of the present, making them feel light by comparison. In his letter to the Romans, written just a few months after he wrote 2 Corinthians, Paul says something similar: “*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us,*” (8:18).

It would be very discouraging to have no hope for the future. To be a Christian does not free us from disappointment, discouragement, or trouble; but our hearts are continually refreshed by our living hope.

Our text today concludes by Paul saying, <sup>5:1</sup> **For we know that, if the earthly tent in which we live is demolished, we have a house from God, not made by human hands, eternal in heaven.**

Our lives here on earth, our earthly existence, are like a tent. They are only of a temporary nature. One day our earthly tent-houses will be “**demolished.**” This is a rather strong word, yet it does not cause Paul to falter, because, he says, “**we know ... we have a house from God, not made by human hands, eternal in heaven.**” We know this, says Paul. Paul knows, he is certain, that “**a house from God... eternal in heaven**” awaits him because that is what God has said. So true and certain, in fact, is this promise of God that Paul can use a present tense verb, “**we have a house from God,**” even though he has not yet left the tent-house of his earthly existence. That is how reliable God’s promises are. If God says it, God’s children have it. We have it.

So, dear friends, have your hearts refreshed by hope. Because we know and trust in Jesus Christ, our Saviour, we are confident that we will live forever with Him. This unequivocal hope surely refreshes our hearts as we face the difficulties and disappointments of life. God has adopted us in Christ to be His children,<sup>4</sup> so we patiently wait for the day when we hear His call, to go home to be with Him forever. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:10-11

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 4:4-5

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PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we praise You for creating all things by Your power, and for sustaining the earth and all who live on it. Let us never forget Your witness to Yourself in Your creation.

Father, we praise You for revealing Yourself to us in Your Word, and for showing us Your holy will. We thank You for the inspired writers of Your wise and true Word, for through them You have shown us Your forgiving love and given us rich promises that give us hope. We praise You for Your grace in Christ Jesus, by which You have provided us our escape from Your judgment on our disobedience. Pour out Your Spirit on us so that we may grow in knowing You.

We praise You for leading us from death to life through the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Your Son. By Your love for us, move us to love You and those about us with a love that isn't mere words, but that is real and active. Give us sympathetic hearts for those in need, that we may share with them the things You have given us. Grant that through our love they may learn to know Your love and praise You.

We thank You that You have prepared salvation for all people, and that through the Gospel You invite all to Your kingdom. Give us opportunities to pass on Your invitation to salvation to people whom we meet in our lives, that they also may respond to Your mercy with thankful hearts. Send forth Your messengers into every corner of our world, so that the lost may rejoice in Your mercy.

Almighty Lord, guide all to whom You have given authority in our country. Bless our society with pure motives, noble goals, and moral strength. Give all Australians the desire to live before You in loving trust and obedience.

Bless our homes, and make them places of true learning and love, that all who live in them may find peace and joy in harmony with You and with one another.

We pray for Your special protection and help for the sick, the sorrowful, the aged, and the lonely. We pray especially for those in our congregation who are unwell. Comfort all who have suffered material loss, and the loss of dear ones. Meet their needs with Your mercy, and show them the wonderful things You have prepared for all Your children. Father, hear our prayers, and if there is anything else we should have asked for, grant it for the sake of Jesus Christ, who has saved us, and pleads for us. Amen.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER  
PENTECOST

Genesis 3:8-15

<sup>8</sup> At the time of the day when there was a breeze, the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden and hid from the presence of the LORD God among the trees in the garden. <sup>9</sup> Then the LORD God called to the man and asked him, “Where are you?”

<sup>10</sup> The man said, “I heard Your voice in the garden and was afraid, because I was naked. So, I hid.”

<sup>11</sup> He said, “Who has told you that you are naked? Have you eaten fruit from the tree from which I have commanded you not to eat?”

<sup>12</sup> Then the man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it.”

<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God asked the woman, “What is this that you have done?”

The woman said, “The snake deceived me, and I ate.”

<sup>14</sup> Then the LORD God told the snake: “Because you have done this, you are cursed, more than every domestic animal and every wild animal. You will crawl on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life. <sup>15</sup> I shall make you and the woman hostile to each other and shall make your descendants and her Descendant hostile to each

other. He will crush your head and you will crush His heel.”

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what Scripture has said, “I have believed and therefore I have spoken,” we also believe and therefore we speak, <sup>14</sup> because we know that the One who has raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and will make us stand before Him with you. <sup>15</sup> For all things are for your benefit, that God’s grace may spread to more and more people and may cause thanksgiving to increase greatly, to the glory of God. <sup>16</sup> That is why we are not discouraged. Rather, even though our outward person is wasting away, our inward person is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary trouble is producing for us an utterly extraordinary and eternal weight of glory. <sup>18</sup> We do not look at the things that are seen but at the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal.

<sup>5:1</sup> For we know that, if the earthly tent in which we live is demolished, we have a house from God, not made by human hands, eternal in heaven.

Mark 3:20-35

<sup>20</sup> Then Jesus came into the house. The crowd gathered again, so that Jesus and those who were with Him were not even able to eat bread. <sup>21</sup> When His

family heard about it, they came out to take charge of Him. For they were saying, “He has gone out of His mind!”<sup>22</sup> The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem began to say, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and, “It is by the ruler of the demons that He is driving out the demons.”

<sup>23</sup> Jesus called them to come to Him and spoke to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan?”<sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.<sup>25</sup> If a family is divided against itself, that family will not be able to stand.<sup>26</sup> If Satan has risen up against himself and has been divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come.<sup>27</sup> Rather, no one can go into the strong man’s house and plunder his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he will plunder his house.<sup>28</sup> Truly, I tell you, all the sins that the sons of men

commit will be forgiven and all the blasphemies that they utter.<sup>29</sup> However, anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven but is guilty of an eternal sin.”

<sup>30</sup> He said this because they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

<sup>31</sup> Just then His mother and His brothers came. They stood outside and sent someone to Him to ask Him to come out.<sup>32</sup> A crowd was sitting around Jesus and they told Him, “Look! Your mother, Your brothers and Your sisters are out-side, looking for You.”

<sup>33</sup> He answered them, “Who are My mother and My brothers?”<sup>34</sup> He looked around at those who sat in a circle around Him and said, “Look! Here are My mother and My brothers.

<sup>35</sup> Whoever does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother.”