
WE ARE CONFIDENT BECAUSE OF WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE IN THE BODY

Sermon for the 4th Sunday after Pentecost, 2018

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

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 first part of our Second Reading read before, 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, that part where the Apostle Paul speaks about the fact that while we groan on this earth in our earthly tents, that is our bodies, yet we know that we have an eternal house from God, which is heaven itself, where there is no groaning, and we look forward to being home with the Lord: **¹ 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. ² To be sure, in this dwelling we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling that is from heaven, ³ since, after we have put it on, we shall not be found naked. ⁴ For we, who are in this tent, groan as we are weighed down, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to put on the additional clothing, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ God is the One who has prepared us for this very thing and who has given us the Spirit as the guarantee. ⁶ Therefore, we are always confident. We know that, while we are at home in this body, we are in a strange land, away from the Lord. ⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident and even prefer to move out of the body and to be at home with the Lord. ⁹ Now, whether we are at home or in a strange land, we aspire to please Him. ¹⁰ We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or bad.**

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

Dear friends in Christ,

During the time after Pentecost, the Church focuses on growth, the liturgical colour is green, and the focus is not so much on the best-known acts of Jesus, but rather on Jesus' teachings and on teachings about Him.

This week, Jesus teaches explicitly about how the kingdom of God grows. Earlier we heard from our First Reading from Ezekiel, a prophecy about God planting a sprig on the mountain of Israel, pointing to the Messiah, who shall grow from the house of David.¹ The Introit, Psalm 1, teaches us about God planting the righteous, who will prosper (Psalm 1:1-3), and in the Gospel, Jesus explains the kingdom of God using parables about planting the smallest of seeds that grows into a large plant and about growth happening without our even knowing how.² All of these lessons point to God, who plants His kingdom and causes faith in Jesus to grow.

Throughout chapters 4 and 5 of 2 Corinthians, Paul is talking about the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This ministry belongs to God, but it is carried forth using fragile human flesh. Paul continues to refer to the frailties of flesh and body as he points forward to the ultimate goal of our eternal bodies, our heavenly home. For now, our bodies are just clay jars,³ the tent of our earthly home, our outward appearance. Yet Christ has prepared for us an eternal glory in which our bodies will be transformed. Therefore, “**we live by faith, not by sight**,” knowing that in Christ we are a new creation.

In our text today, the Apostle Paul says that “¹⁰ **We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or bad.**” What does this mean? What does it mean that we will be judged based on what we do in the body? That doesn’t sound at all like what we teach. And how is this related to the rest of what Paul has to say?

Paul begins in verse 1 by saying: “¹ **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.**” Paul is here talking, at the beginning and throughout this passage, about our bodies. At some point our bodies here on earth, our earthly homes, will be demolished, destroyed. They are temporary, impermanent like a tent. The prophet Isaiah once said that “*My dwelling-place had been pulled out and laid bare away from me like a shepherd’s tent. I had*

¹ Ezekiel 17:22-24

² Mark 4:26-34

³ 2 Corinthians 4:7

rolled up my life like a weaver. He was going to cut me off from the warp on the loom. From day to night You were going to bring me to an end,” (Is. 38:12). The time will come when this tent, this mortal body, will be destroyed by physical death.

Have you ever gone camping? Some people enjoy getting back to nature, sitting around a campfire and living in a tent for a few days. But for others, while they too, like getting back to nature, they don't like the idea of sleeping in a tent, preferring instead to lodge in something a bit more comfortable. Why? Well, for them, no matter where they lie, there's a big rock sticking in your back. The wind whistles through the flaps and zippers of the tent, and you never seem to be quite warm enough. By morning, the sides of the tent are moist with condensation, and a simple touch causes a drop of water to run down the tent and drip onto your sleeping bag. Then if it rains, there's the inevitable pinprick leak in the seam right above your face. And even worse, if it storms, there's no sleep, for you worry that the tent might collapse or blow over. You're never quite comfortable or at home in a temporary dwelling like a tent... or an impermanent dwelling like our earthly bodies.

So, God will give us an eternal home, an upgrade to the stately heavenly mansion - an immortal body that He Himself has restored. Think about living in a mansion. From the outside, it is majestic and elegant, grand and permanent. On the inside, you're protected from all those elements that can be so unsettling in a tent. You can't hear the wind howling nor the thunder nor the lightning. There's no condensation or leak. You live and sleep in perfect comfort: no aches, no pains. This will be your new body, your heavenly immortal home - beautiful on the outside and perfect on the inside.

Wouldn't we want to have that eternal dwelling now? Wouldn't we want to move out of the tent into the beautiful mansion? ² **To be sure, in this dwelling we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling that is from heaven.** Yes, we do want to put on the heavenly dwelling. We want to move out of the tent and into the permanent mansion that awaits. But there's a catch. Not everyone gets a glorious, eternal, permanent dwelling. Paul says: “³ **since, after we have put it on, we shall not be found naked.**” You see, in eternity

we will all receive what is due: either a permanent heavenly dwelling, our bodies glorified, or our bodies stripped bare of any heavenly glory.

Here on earth, we have put on Christ and the garment of His righteousness by means of the Word and the Sacraments.⁴ Without this covering of the innocence and righteousness of Christ the shame of a person's nakedness will appear⁵, and there will be no putting on of the garment of Christ's heavenly glory. Some will be found naked.

Paul continues: “⁴ **For we, who are in this tent, groan as we are weighed down, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to put on the additional clothing, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.**” While on this earth, in our temporary dwelling of this mortal body, we groan, feeling the weight and burden of the sin that is within our flesh. It weighs us down, ages our bodies, slows our step. It puts creaks in our bones, wrinkles in our skin, puts shade over our eyes, and mufflers on our ears.

Sadly, there are many who tire of life and its excessive burdens - a sad state which Christians should conquer. Some also tremble at the thought of death, but this, too, is not the normal Christian feeling. Worldly men prefer anything to the great fluctuations of this life and then simply throw life away with the thought that the hereafter cannot be worse. This negativity is wholly foreign to Paul. When he groans under a heavy burden, the reason is “**because we do not wish to be unclothed but to put on the additional clothing.**” Paul's longing for death was not simply a wish “**to be unclothed,**” that is, to get out of this life with all its attendant problems. *It is not a longing to escape but a longing to attain.* It is not cowardice but glorious hope. Death for Paul, as well as for every Christian, is not an escape. It is entry into life in its fullest dimension. It is putting “**on the additional clothing.**” It is that which are “**mortal,**” our earthly tent-houses, being “**swallowed up by life.**” It is victory. It is to “*be with Christ, which is better by far,*” (Philippians 1:23).

Now, why, in eternity, will some be found naked and others will be further clothed? Why will some be found without a glorious dwelling while some will

⁴ Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14

⁵ Revelation 3:18

live in the heavenly mansion? Here we're back to our original question, when St. Paul says: "¹⁰ **We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or bad.**" Note, first of all, we must all appear before the judgment seat. No one will escape. It is before this judgment seat that each will either receive a key to that glorious heavenly mansion or will be left naked - all based on what is done in the body, whether good or bad.

Is Paul here really saying that in order to inherit the heavenly mansion we must do good in the body? A few weeks back on Trinity Sunday, we confessed in the Athanasian Creed, "*At His coming all men shall rise with their bodies and give an account of their own deeds. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, and those who have done evil will go into everlasting fire.*" These words reflect the words of Paul. Are we really judged and rewarded based on what we do? If that's the case, how can we ever be certain that we've done enough? How can we ever know that, on our personal scale of justice, the good things we've done outweigh the sinful things? What about those unintentional sins? Like when you blurt out something without thinking. It hurts someone, offends her, and you may not even know you did that. Those don't count against you, do they? They weren't intentional!

What about those sins of neglect? Like when we know somebody needs help and we don't help. Or there's something we know we should do but ignore it or get lazy about doing it. Does that count as something bad done in the body? Because we didn't actually do something bad.

Or what if we've done a number of good things in the body and then we do one really bad thing? Does that wipe out all the good things? Are there different weights to the good and bad things, so that if we do some really good things it will wipe out a number of bad things? Or does each good or evil deed count only as one?

We are fooling ourselves if this is how we think. Anyone who is familiar at all with the corpus of Paul's writing⁶ makes clear that this passage, and what

⁶ compare, for example, Rom 2:5-8 with Rom 3:19-28; Eph 2:8-9; and countless other passages

the Athanasian Creed also confesses, cannot be understood as works-righteousness. On our own, in our bodies, we can do nothing but evil. We're asking questions, but there's an answer. We can't ever do enough good in the body to receive the glorious heavenly dwelling! *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* (Rom. 3:23). If this is true, and it is, then how can we receive it?

Paul gives us the answer in this next verse: ⁵ **God is the One who has prepared us for this very thing and who has given us the Spirit as the guarantee.** You see, left on our own, we cannot do good things. But God can. It's God who does them, and it's He who's prepared us for this new heavenly dwelling. How does He do this?

Christ does it by taking our sin, our evil deeds, into His body. He who knew no sin became sin for us.⁷ We are clothed with Jesus' righteousness, a righteousness earned for us by Christ through His perfect life and sacrificial death in our place. He has conquered sin within His body on the cross, and God has **“given us the Spirit as the guarantee.”** The Greek word Paul uses here for **“guarantee”** is a word he had used once before in this letter.⁸ The word was used by Greek businessmen as the equivalent of our English down payment, or deposit. It was the first instalment of a total amount due and thus served as a pledge of more to come.

Paul's point is this: The presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is God's personal guarantee of more to come. The gift of the Holy Spirit is God's pledge that one day **“what is mortal,”** our earthly lives, will be **“swallowed up by life,”** the eternal life that never ends.

How does one know if he or she has been given the Spirit? To rely on feelings is not an accurate gauge, since feelings fluctuate. One day a person may feel that he has the Spirit; another day that feeling may not be there. It is far wiser to rely on the never-fluctuating promises of God. God's Word says that if you have been baptised, you have received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). God's Word also says that if the confession of your heart is that Jesus is Lord,

⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁸ 2 Corinthians 1:22

you have received the Holy Spirit, for you cannot have made such a confession apart from the working of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).

The Spirit, whom God gives as a guarantee of what is to come, encourages us to continue to carry out our ministries in the face of opposition. No matter what happens, even if the earthly tent is destroyed, there is something better to come.

“⁶ Therefore, we are always confident. We know that, while we are at home in this body, we are in a strange land, away from the Lord. ⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight.” We see through the eyes of faith. In faith, we see that all of our bad deeds, our sinful deeds, are taken away in the body of Christ on the cross. In faith, we see that the Spirit is the One who does good deeds through our body. Therefore, in faith we see that heavenly dwelling, that perfect body, which is waiting for us. **“⁸ We are confident and even prefer to move out of the body and to be at home with the Lord. ⁹ Now, whether we are at home or in a strange land, we aspire to please Him.”**

It’s like living in a tent down in the valley of a campground. Up on the hill in the distance you can see the mansion. It’s a glorious mansion. You know you have a reservation there. There’s a room there that’s waiting for you. But you must wait. In the meantime, you persevere and live in the tent in the valley of the shadow. Yes, when the storms come through, the wind whips through the tent’s flaps, and the rain drips in through the seams, the bones creak, the eyesight fails, the step slows. Yet you persevere, knowing that at some point it is guaranteed you’ll move up; you will leave this temporary tent and move into that grand, permanent heavenly dwelling.

But, before that happens, before you move up, you will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. It can’t be avoided. Then you will receive what is due to you. And what is due? A permanent heavenly dwelling because Christ has taken away the evil deeds in the body, His body, and the Spirit has done good through your body, by faith.

Therefore, live in that assurance and be **confident**. One day, this temporary dwelling, in which we groan, will be replaced by an eternal heavenly dwelling. It will be! If it is a blessed experience to be able to live now **“by faith,”** how much more blessed will it be to live forever **“by sight”!** The apostle John

expresses this thought in his First Letter: *“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,”* (1 John 3:2). Because of Christ’s work, we have eternal life, before whose judgment seat we will stand. He Himself once stood before a judgment seat, that of Pilate, and then went on to Calvary so that we never have to fear to stand before His judgment seat. **“We have a house from God.... we shall not be found naked.”** That is Paul’s confidence. That is every believer’s confidence. That is our confidence. Amen.

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

PRAYER FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lord our God, You are our strength and our joy, for everything You do is marked by kindness and love. Because You are gracious, we trust in You and offer You our prayers.

We thank and praise You for all Your kindness to us: for blessing us with life, for equipping us with all our powers of body and soul, for giving us the ability to be useful, for permitting us to enjoy Your creation, and for surrounding us with the warmth of human relationships in every facet of life.

We confess our sins before You, repent of them, and earnestly turn from them. Do not look on us in anger, for Jesus’ sake. We praise You above all else for Your grace in Christ Jesus. You have sent Your Son to die on the cross, and have raised Him in power and glory, to provide all the riches of our salvation. In Him You have given us free pardon for all our sins, the strength to overcome evil, and the sure hope of eternal life.

We rejoice in the death of Your Son, through which you have been reconciled to us, so that we may approach You as a God of love. Comfort us with Your free forgiveness, and fill us with the new life of the Spirit. Help us to be alert and to stand firm in faith in every temptation and test, so that we may resist Satan and His evil tricks, and hold our ground against all evil.

Be gracious to Your Church, O God, that it may seek the lost, lift up the fallen, comfort the broken-hearted, and heal the afflicted. Enable Your pastors and people to proclaim with courage and conviction the message of life in

Christ Jesus, and to declare to all people Your mighty acts of judgment and mercy. Cause growth among us, through Your powerful Word.

Reveal Your power to all lands and nations. Remind people everywhere that You are the Lord of all history, that You judge the leaders of the nations, and that You have the power to break bows, shatter spears, and destroy all human might. Grant that all people may turn to You and follow Your truth.

Be the heavenly guest in all our homes. Move all families to trust You in everything, and to love and serve each other, until that day comes when You call us from our homes on earth to live with You in our heavenly home for ever.

Bless all who are in any need of body or soul. Teach them to humble themselves under Your mighty hand, trusting that You remove all burdens in Your own good time. Teach them to place all their worries on You, and assure them of Your infinite understanding and loving care.

Gracious God, since You have called us to share eternal glory in Christ, make us strong, and make our lives holy. Hear our prayers for the sake of Jesus, to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

4th Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 17:22-24

²² This is what the Lord GOD has said: "I Myself shall take one of the highest sprigs of a cedar-tree and set it out. I shall pluck off one of the topmost of its tender twigs and I Myself shall plant it on a high and lofty mountain. ²³ I shall plant it on the mountain-height of Israel. It will send out branches, produce fruit and become a magnificent cedar-tree. Every bird, every winged creature, will live under it. They will live in the shade of its branches. ²⁴ Then all the trees

in the field will know that I am the LORD and that I have brought the high tree down low. I have made the low tree grow high. I have made the fresh tree wither and have caused the dry tree to sprout. I am the LORD. I have spoken, and I shall do it."

2 Corinthians 5:1-17

¹ 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. ² To be sure, in this dwelling we groan, longing to

be clothed with our dwelling that is from heaven,³ since, after we have put it on, we shall not be found naked.⁴ For we, who are in this tent, groan as we are weighed down, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to put on the additional clothing, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.⁵ God is the One who has prepared us for this very thing and who has given us the Spirit as the guarantee.⁶ Therefore, we are always confident. We know that, while we are at home in this body, we are in a strange land, away from the Lord.⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight.⁸ We are confident and even prefer to move out of the body and to be at home with the Lord.⁹ Now, whether we are at home or in a strange land, we aspire to please Him.¹⁰ We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or bad.

¹¹ Therefore, since we know the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade people. God already knows what we are like, and I hope that this has also become plain to your

consciences.¹² We are not recommending ourselves to you again but are giving you an opportunity to boast about us. We are doing this that you may answer those who boast about what is outward rather than about what is in the heart.¹³ For, if we are out of our minds, it is for God. If our minds are sound, it is for you.¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One has died for all. Therefore, all have died.¹⁵ He has died for all, that those who live may no longer live for themselves but for Him, who has died for them and has been raised.¹⁶ Therefore, from now on we do not regard anyone from a human point of view. Although we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, yet now we no longer regard Him in this way.¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Look! They have become new!

Mark 4:26-34

²⁶ Then He said: "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground,²⁷ and should sleep and get up, by night and by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, although he does not know

how. ²⁸ All by itself the ground produces grain, first the green blade, then the head and then the full wheat in the head. ²⁹ As soon as the grain is ready, he puts in the sickle, because harvest has come.”

³⁰ Then He asked, “To what are we to compare the kingdom of God or with what parable are we to present it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when it is sown on the ground, is a very small seed among all the seeds on earth. ³² Nevertheless, when it is sown, it comes up and becomes the largest of all the garden plants. It produces large branches, so that the birds of the sky can make their dwelling under its shade.”

³³ He used many parables like these to speak the Word to them, as they could hear it. ³⁴ He did not speak to them without using a parable. However, in private He used to explain everything fully to His disciples.