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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

**Weekend of Sunday, June 6, 2021**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 10/Proper X/Year B**

**First Reading: Genesis 3:8-15**

**Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1**

**Gospel Reading: Mark 3:20-35**

**Sermon Title: “*The Eternal Weight of Glory*”**

**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**

<sup>13</sup>Just 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, <sup>14</sup>because 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. <sup>15</sup>Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

<sup>16</sup>So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, <sup>18</sup>because 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.

<sup>5:1</sup>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**

During June, I will be preaching a short sermon series based on the Second Readings from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians. Along the way, I intend to teach you a little bit about the apostle Paul the author of the two letters to the Corinthians, Corinth the city and its people, some surprising theories about the two letters that are in the New Testament, and some of the issues that Paul faced with the Corinthian fellowship. So let's get started:

### **Paul**

Paul was a passionate man, given to a wide range of emotions. He had genuine heartfelt affection for the Corinthian people that made up the fellowship he founded. We observe his anger and distress in his letters to the Corinthians. Perhaps this is because he founded the fellowship in Corinth and had a lot of skin in the game, so to speak. But we will learn that the feeling of affection was not always mutual. Oh, the Corinthians loved and appreciated the man who brought them to faith in Jesus Christ, but Paul was demanding and insistent and behaved with them as if he was their master at times, and that made the people resentful.

### **Corinth**

The city of Corinth was prominent in the first century. It is located in Greece on an isthmus between the Aegean and Ionian Seas, which guaranteed its importance both militarily and commercially. Corinth was the capital of the Roman province Achaia. It was a prosperous city but also known for its immorality. Because of Corinth's sordid reputation, a new Greek word was coined, *korinthiazomai*, which meant "to live immorally like a Corinthian." So imagine a wealthy pagan population whom Paul preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to, with all the passion that Paul was known for, and having enough success in the community to establish a house church – don't be thinking of Zion, think of several, maybe 50 people who gather regularly to hear Paul and his associates preach and teach and lead worship.

### **Date and Location**

There are two letters addressed to the Corinthians in the canon of scripture. The dates of the letters can only be estimated in general terms. Nevertheless, Bible scholars estimate that 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians was written by Paul from Ephesus in the fall or winter of 53 or 54 CE or approximately 20 years after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## The Letters

And now what I am about to say might just blow your mind. We all know that there are two letters in the Bible written by Paul to the Corinthians: First and Second Corinthians. However, Bible scholars believe that though the letters generally seem to be assembled in chronological order, what we actually have is a collection of fragments of *five letters* that ancient scholars put together into the two letters we know as First and Second Corinthians.

How could this happen? Allow me to offer a scenario. Bible scholars believe that Paul wrote perhaps five letters. The single editions of each of those letters were likely written on some ancient non-durable material like papyrus which simply did not survive, and in time, broke into pieces called *fragments*. The fact is, the oldest documents that exist that are attributed to the apostle Paul are dated to be from 175 to 250 CE, meaning long after Paul.

How can this be, you ask? First of all, it is unlikely that Paul's hand wrote any of his letters. Writing material was too expensive and illiteracy was rampant. So Paul would have had a scribe write his letters and he would have signed them. But those original single edition letters would, over time and with handling, break down. And because the teachings of the original apostles were regarded as scripture, they were hand-copied and disseminated to other Christian fellowships.

So while Bible scholar scholars don't agree on where the breaks in the letters should be, I am going to offer the following based on my study of what Bible scholars think:

- Letter A – lost
- Letter B – First Corinthians
- Letter C – lost
- Letter D – Second Corinthians 1-9
- Letter E – Second Corinthians 10-13

The reason Bible scholars think that Letters A and C originally existed and have been lost is that Paul referred to them in the surviving letters. Now that I've told you that, I want to introduce you to another Greek word, *adiaphora*. *Adiaphora* means “things that don't matter” and that is what I am telling you about this issue of the five letters. It is enough to know that Paul wrote letters to the Corinthian

fellowship on a range of issues and we have a lot of it, and what we have is worthy of our study, but how it is compiled in your Bibles doesn't matter.

Finally then, to today's installment from 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 and a sermon I have entitled, "*The Eternal Weight of Glory.*"

Each week I will go into greater detail about who made up the Corinthian fellowship, but for now suffice it to say that they were a mixture of Jewish proselytes to Christianity and Gentiles, people who formerly worshiped the many pagan idols of Greece.

And each week I will go into greater detail about who Paul was and what his motivations were that made him the man he was, but for now, suffice it to say that he was a Pharisee, and the Pharisees maintained that an afterlife existed and that God punished the wicked and rewarded the righteous in the world to come.

In this passage that is our First Reading for today, Paul was attempting to encourage the Corinthians, who together may or may not have any concept of an afterlife, that a life of discipleship in Jesus Christ would be worth the effort. Paul wrote and taught that if the Christian lived a life modeled after Jesus', and to a lesser degree after his own, they would not only please God with their godly living but they would also inherit eternal life.

So to the Corinthians, Paul wrote

<sup>14</sup>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.

The "we" here refers to his partner Timothy as well as the other apostles who together over time are figuring out Christian theology. So what Paul is saying is that whatever teaching or correction preceded or followed this passage, will be worth it because "we know" that we will be resurrected to live with Jesus. And the "we" includes not only himself, but the other apostles who were first-hand eye-witnesses to Jesus' ministry, passion, death, and resurrection.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, eternal life is the Christian's hope that Jesus himself spoke of. It is the reward for a life of discipleship in him. Whatever suffering, self-

sacrificing, serving of others that we are led to do by his Holy Spirit, will pale in comparison to the glory that awaits us.

Paul went on to say that “everything” including all of his own travels and troubles, his suffering, and even the disrespect of the Corinthians are signs of God’s grace. He persevered in his ministry of evangelism so that more people would be exposed to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that thanksgiving would increase, and that brings glory to God.

Speaking personally now, going through seminary is an arduous four-year-long task. In my class, there were several who dropped out before graduation. But graduation is meaningless without ordination. In the Lutheran tradition of the ELCA, a candidate for ministry cannot be ordained without receiving a call to serve a church. Provided that has happened, an ordination is scheduled, and after the vows of ordination are given and answered to, the presider announces that the candidate is now a pastor and there is usually spontaneous applause.

That happened at my ordination and not used to being the focus of attention, I recall being overwhelmed at that moment and put my hands in my face – I don't really know why. But then I collected myself and applauded back to those in attendance as my way of saying, “I didn’t get here on my own. Look what we have done together.” This is what I see when I read what Paul has written. All that God does through the apostle Paul and others is for our sakes, so that more people will hear the Gospel, and will come to faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ, and give thanks to God, which in turn gives God glory.

Not in this passage, but in other places, Paul wrote that though he suffered miserably and has been persecuted for his work of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he will not lose heart; he will persevere. He acknowledged that he is just a mortal and his “outer nature” is wasting away, but he considered that a “slight momentary affliction.” And indeed, compared to *"The Eternal Weight of Glory"* the trouble we experience in this life is just a “slight momentary affliction.”

In expending his "outer nature," his physical being for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, his “inner nature” was being fortified. If you have followed the leading of the Holy Spirit then you know what he is talking about – there is an

energy that comes back to us when we are useful to God. This is what he called the “what cannot be seen” – the things we do that will pay back in eternal dividends.

And he concluded this passage by reminding his readers what he has been taught, and that is that all that we know in this temporal life, our bodies, and even the earth itself will pass away. The only hope anyone has is the hope of life eternal with Christ and through Christ.

### **Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us never lose sight of the bigger picture. This life we enjoy right now is just the warm-up act for life-eternal. Let us use this time, this life, this mortal body, to live lives of discipleship in Jesus Christ, for that brings glory to God. And while we cannot earn our way to eternal life, the reward for a life of faithfulness is what Jesus promised. Let us do all we can to demonstrate our thanks now.

### **Prayer**

Loving and merciful God, we give you thanks for the life and ministry of the apostle Paul, whose tenacity you used to help spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ around the world. Let his example inspire us to do all we can do using the gifts you have given us, to further your kingdom. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen