

Weekend of Sunday, June 17, 2018
4th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 11/Proper 6/Year B
Primary Text: 2 Corinthians 5:6-17
Sermon Title: “Let’s Have a Trust Walk!”

Theme

Paul encourages believers to live by faith and not by sight. We do not consider Jesus from a human perspective but through the eyes of faith, believing he died for all and was raised. All who are in Christ are now in God’s new creation.

Text

⁶So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord — ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

¹¹Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. ¹²We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. ¹³For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Sermon

How many of you know what a *trust walk* is? Have you ever gone on a *trust walk*? I have on a couple of occasions.

Each seminary student in the ELCA and most main-line denominations for that matter, must take 400 hours of Clinical Pastoral Education. CPE, as it is known, is a regimented and supervised experience of chaplaincy and I did mine at Methodist Hospital of Indianapolis. The program is designed to prepare candidates for ministry by exposing them to some of life's most acute situations so that when we are in those situations as a pastor we will have been there before and can draw on that experience to help our parishioners through it. Anyway, the program I went through was fantastic in many unusual ways, but what is pertinent to this sermon is that we went on a trust walk.

A trust walk is usually done in teams of two people. One is blind-folded and the other guides the first by the hand, often stopping to experience the sensation of an object the blind-folded one cannot see. When I was blind-folded, I was guided over fairly rough terrain where I trusted that my guide would warn me or navigate me around so that I remained safe. And since we did this at a Catholic retreat center, I was led to statues that I could feel and form an idea of who or what the statue was.

Here is the point. None of us gets through life on our own. Even with the advances of reproductive science, we need biological parents to form the embryo that will become us, and a mother to carry us as a fetus to full term. And then in the best situations, both parents, a loving mother and father, to nurture us into maturity.

Even after maturity, say graduation from high school, many of us will continue our educations. And even after we are mature adults, we need mentors and companions and colleagues to continue our journey through life. This week alone, I met with my pastor colleagues to study the readings for this weekend, and I met with Sr. Pat to discuss a pastoral care situation. In that way, I do a trust walk every day. I trust that my loved-ones and colleagues and others will guide me through my life's journey, keeping me from harm as best they are able.

In this third part of a four-part sermon series based on the Second Readings from Second Corinthians, Paul wrote as much to the Corinthians. In the passage we have

today, he addressed a concern that must have been making its way through the fellowship about the eternal destiny of those Christians who died before Christ's return – which, as it turns out, is all of us. Paul began this passage by reminding them and therefore us, that as Christians we can and should be confident in our faith. He reminds us that as Christians, it doesn't matter whether we are alive in our physical bodies or at home with the LORD in our spiritual bodies – whatever that might look like. Because, as he said in verse 7,

⁷we walk by faith, not by sight

In other words, because of our faith in Jesus Christ, our spiritual journeys are a trust walk; we continue on, trusting that no matter what happens, Christ is with us. He gives us his Holy Spirit as our spiritual guide. If we let it, the Holy Spirit would like to be our guide as we take the trust walk of faith. And that trust walk of faith is the path we should follow in good times and in bad.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul said it even more poignantly when he wrote,

Romans 14:8-9 **If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.**

It was at this point of my sermon preparation that I stopped to make a phone call. Do you remember the Rev. Frank Gross? If I could find a picture I would offer it, but I don't have one. Some of you should remember him because he was on staff here for a short time as a preaching pastor after Pr. Mark Williams left and before Pr. Dave Smith came.

I have known Pr. Gross for my entire ordained life, more than 20 years, because our vocational paths have crossed on couple of calls. Anyway, I saw him at the Synod Assembly from a distance and he was walking like the Tin Man with the assistance of his wife, and then he was gone. I didn't see him again. I called him Thursday morning and in talking with him I learned that he has had cancer for two years and was doing all doctoring that was prescribed, but now nothing seems to be working and so he made the decision to cease most treatment. He said, "I prefer to die of the disease, rather than the poison they want to put in my body." He went on to say that

he wants to enjoy his family, and continue to serve as interim pastor at a small church near Alliance where he lives. He isn't angry or bitter or singing the "why me?" song. He is thankful for the life the LORD has given him and will continue to serve the LORD and the LORD's people as long as he can.

Pr. Gross is another example of a few long-serving pastors whom I have known and admired from afar for their maturity and steadfastness and wisdom. When, in church and life, we talk about the saints who have inspired us by their example, Pr. Gross is one in whom I have found inspiration. He walks by faith, and not by sight. He is taking the ultimate trust walk. Are you?

Paul also wrote in verse nine about each one appearing before the judgement seat of Christ. Without proper parsing that might sound threatening. And while it may be true that Paul was trying any means possible to get the Corinthians to abandon their pagan ways and replace them with godly disciplines, we must take that exhortation into consideration with the rest of the passage.

At the end of the passage Paul reminds us that one, Christ, died for all so that all might live, no longer for ourselves, which is a pointless existence, but for him who died and was raised, Jesus Christ, so that we too might be raised to live again eternally.

Friends we did not and cannot create ourselves. We were created out of love by our heavenly Father to whom we hope to return when our days on earth are done. That might be called the book ends of the Christian life. But what happens in between is the living testimony of what we say we believe.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

My Raisin' the Bar Challenge for you this week is to reflect on your life to this point. If it's not what you would want to defend before the Lord Jesus, then repent and ask for forgiveness. God has told us through the prophets that what is forgiven is forgotten (Jeremiah 31:33-34), and then like Paul encouraged the Corinthians, I encourage you to begin anew. The God we worship is a God of second chances, and thirds and fourths, and so on. I count on it in faith. And you should to, or we are all lost.

At the conclusion of this passage, Paul poetically wrote,

¹⁷if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

This is how much God revealed in Jesus Christ loves us. The best thanks we can give is to live the redeemed life.

Prayer

Lord God our Heavenly Father, today we are reminded of just how much you love us and provide for us. Not just sustenance and protection for our physical lives, but also nourishment and safe-keeping for our spiritual lives. Forgive us for our sinfulness and shortcomings; and continue to send us your Holy Spirit to guide us to godly living and ultimately to our heavenly home. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, your son and our Lord. Amen