

Singing the Faith: Walking by Faith

Romans 8: 18-25

2Corinthians 4:16—5:7

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:7

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

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. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling—if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. The One who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— for we walk by faith, not by sight.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

There is a lot going on in this high-octane passage from Paul, and it comes to a crescendo in verse 7 (we walk by faith, not by sight), and that verse will be our focus for a few minutes. The hymn, “Just a closer walk” (which we’ll sing in a moment) is loosely based on this verse, and living by faith and future hope is a theme of our songs this morning. As it is in our readings.

There is a yearning felt in this passage, as there is in the Romans passage. Could you feel it? Words and phrases like “eager longing” and “groaning” and “wishing to be further clothed” (speaking of our resurrection body in heaven) resonate with us. We feel it in our bodies, don’t we? Even the word “hope” carries a sense of longing for something—something more, something different. Something better. I must say, though, that while Paul is talking about our earthly bodies being temporary, and our resurrection bodies being eternal, I wish he would’ve found a different way of talking about what happens to our temporal human bodies over time; you know, rather than saying that we’re “wasting away” and our bodies “decay” and all that. I’d rather not think of my humanity as wasting away or decaying, but maturing; or becoming well-seasoned or something. But, he makes point here. And he probably uses the stark language to emphasize the point that what’s being prepared for us is spectacular by comparison, and what we’re experiencing now is temporary, in light of eternity.

Being human is remarkable, and beautiful, and we celebrate our humanity. As God said at creation, when he made human beings, “it is very good.” We celebrate not just *having* a body, but *being* a body. And yet, at the same time, we long for more. We long for release from the burden of aches and pains and diseases, release from our struggles to keep ourselves on an even keel, physically

and mentally and emotionally. And the great news of our faith is, there is resurrection! We will be clothed with resurrection bodies, which will be glorious. It's a mystery; we don't know exactly what a resurrection body is, or what it will be like, but we are told it's going to be amazing.

And Paul says that this longing and coming resurrection isn't just a human experience. As he says in Romans, even creation itself longs to be set free from its struggles, its "bondage to decay" as he puts it. We've been hard on creation! And we're hard on ourselves, and sometimes each other. Add to that, covid, and extreme heat! We, collectively—earth, people, animals—yearn for more; we yearn for better, for renewal. And, in Paul's words, for heavenly glory and fulfillment.

Because Paul says that these "slight and momentary afflictions" (now there's perspective! Our pain and struggle in this life do not feel slight or momentary; they sometimes feel substantial and enduring. But I think he's saying, in light of eternity and of our big and loving God, our afflictions are slight and momentary)—Paul says that our afflictions are preparing for us something spectacular and amazing. The "lavish celebration prepared for us" (as Eugene

Peterson translates it in *The Message*). “These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times.”

And what’s equally remarkable and amazing, is that amidst the outward struggles, whether in our bodies or what’s happening in the world and creation, we experience inward renewal now, day by day. Did you catch that? That’s an audacious statement. Though outwardly it often looks like things are falling apart on us, he says, on the inside not a day goes by without God’s grace unfolding, where God is making new life.

That seems hard to believe, but it’s true. It’s just happening beyond our conscious awareness; which is what makes it hard to believe. And that’s why we live by faith and not by... *sight*. We trust that the Spirit of God *is* at work in us, even if it’s beyond our sight, and beyond our conscious awareness.

So let’s ponder this as we prepare for communion today: What does it mean to walk by faith (and not by sight)? By “walk” he means “live.” “Walk” in the Bible is a metaphor for living a certain lifestyle.

Living by faith, walking by faith means:

1. To keep acting, and keep trusting, even if you don’t know where you are going. Or where the world is going.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "*Faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase.*" Those are some of the truest words I have ever heard! In this way, "walk by faith, not by sight" means, even though you might not be able to see where you're going, or what lies ahead, you keep going, putting your weight down on God's promises.

This applies to each of us personally, and it applies to us collectively.

It was true for the Israelites in desert, following their redemption and release from Egyptian slavery. Even though the people did not know where they were going, they kept moving and trusting and looked to God as their guide, day by day. They had to live day by day, and trust God to guide and to provide.

And we're kind of in an Exodus world right now. The future seems uncertain. However, we know the One who holds the future, and are asked to trust the Lord of the future to work all things together for good, because we rest in his love for us in the present.

Here is a great prayer that exemplified this. It's by Thomas Merton prayer. Thomas Merton was an American businessman who was called to devote himself to prayer and writing, so he joined the Catholic order of Trappist monks and lived

in a monastery in Kentucky. This is one of his heartfelt prayers, and this could be our prayer:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I cannot see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But, I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire
in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything
apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this
you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore I will trust you always
though I may seem to be lost and
in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me
and you will never leave me
to face my perils alone.

Isn't that a great prayer? And does it not ring true for us right now?

Walking by faith and not by sight means that we live today according to God's promises, even though we cannot see them fulfilled just yet, and we may not know where the road leads.

Along those lines, walking by faith and not by sight also means:

2. To trust God, even when you can't see God working. To understand that there is more going on than what can be seen.

Hebrews 11:1: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Walking by faith and not by sight means that, in spite of what we see going on in the world, or what we experience personally, we trust that God is working all things together for good at this time in our lives, and history.

We live 'as if...' *As if*... there is a bright future; *as if* God really will keep promises and do what he says; *as if* God is at work in my life, under the surface, bringing inward renewal day by day.

Our friend Dan Anderson is a great example of this—I talked with him last week (and he gave me permission to tell a bit of his story). He was serving a life sentence, as one of the first three-strikers in Washington state. One of the things about Dan that impressed our OPOP team was that even before he found out he had been granted clemency and that he would be eventually released, years before that he got sober and did the work to recover from his addiction, and worked to make himself a better person, even though he knew at the time that he was serving a life sentence. He exercised, he read books, he got a job in

prison. He trusted God for his future, and believed he was worth it, because God was at work in him. He walked by faith and not by sight—from a prison cell.

When I asked him to tell me more about this, he told me that he had to think and act *as if*... as if he had a future, as if he could and would have a good life. Had said, “I to think, in 10 years...” then when 10 years came: “in 15 years...” Then when 20 came, he kept walking in faith, and acting “as if.”

Then, lo and behold, the state changed the three strikes law, and saw that his crimes and the charges weren’t worthy of the sentence he, and others like him, got, and he was granted clemency. Dan walked by faith and not by sight. Sight told him he was a lifer, and done for. Sight told him it was hopeless. Sight told him, just harden your heart in prison. Sight said, you’re not worth improving.

But *faith* in the unseen God, and an unknown future, told him otherwise. And here he is now, working a good paying full-time job, able to support himself and his mother here in Lynnwood, and living a productive and joyful life, in faith. And, he said he just bought a 2015 pickup truck as his symbol of his new life. Dan said, “I have everything I could possibly need, and want.”

Walking/living by faith and not by sight means that we trust God, even when you can't see him working, or when there seems to be evidence to the contrary. To understand that there is more going on than what can be seen.

3. To live by faith and not by sight means that, when all is said and done, God will prevail and bring all things to glorious fulfillment.

It means that God has prepared a new heaven and a new earth, where there will be no more pain, no more tears, no more suffering, no more death. We'll sing about that at the end of the service. This is what Paul means, when he says that God is preparing for us an "eternal weight of glory, beyond all measure." We don't see it yet, although we get glimpses of it now, in special moments.

God sometimes opens up windows into eternity here and there, to give us a glimpse of what is to come.

Jesus alludes to this in his words at the communion table, about the coming kingdom. What we experience in communion is, as he said, a foretaste of what's to come. Even in these little communion kits!

With that in mind, I'd like to close with a few verses from the prophet Isaiah, who describes what we can expect, when faith *becomes* sight, and we see and experience God's bounty in all its fullness. Here is Isaiah 25:6-9:

⁶ On that day, the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained
clear.

⁷ And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;

⁸ he will swallow up death for ever.

Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all
the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

⁹ It will be said on that day,

Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save
us.

This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Let us be glad and rejoice as we celebrate communion this morning.

Just a Closer Walk