

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

“We Do Not Lose Heart”

April 4, 2021

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Easter Sunday

Our sermon text this Easter Sunday in the year of Lord 2021 is found in 2 Corinthians 4:13-18.

In this passage, the apostle Paul reflects on the reality of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and what that means for the future resurrection of all who trust in him, and in doing so, meditates also on how this Easter promise of Jesus’ resurrection and ours reframes the experience of suffering in the lives of those who belong to the risen Christ.

I invite you now to listen carefully to God’s holy word from 2 Corinthians 4:13-18, which is printed for you on the back of your order of worship if you’d like to follow along.

Here, the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes these words:

*“Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, ‘I believed, and so I spoke,’ we also believe, and we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.*

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”*

Thus far the reading of God's word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in heaven loves you. Let's pray...

The first thing to acknowledge - to just get out of the way as we begin this morning is to say that what orthodox Christians have believed now for two thousand years regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ is pretty glorious and wild.

I mean, don't get me wrong - we shouldn't be embarrassed about what we believe regarding the resurrection in the least. But we need to also remember the strangeness of it.

A few minutes ago we confessed, as Christians have done for two millennia, that we believe that Jesus Christ, after being crucified under Pontus Pilate, rose again on the third day, according to the Scriptures.

What this means is this: first, we believe that Jesus was crucified and died.

A more contemporary way of describing this is that we believe that Jesus of Nazareth, the only begotten son of God - true God and true man - was publicly tortured to death.

What we mean when we say Jesus was crucified and died is that Jesus' body was beaten with fists, scourged by a whip, pierced by thorns, and then he was paraded through a well-populated city during its most significant annual religious festival to a hill outside the gates where he was nailed to a piece of wood and left hanging up in the air to slowly die in full view of everyone.

Strangers, drawn by the spectacle, perversely fascinated to watch another man die. Enemies, jeering and laughing, gloating over his death.

His friends (at least those who hadn't run away) standing in shock and terror, totally powerless to do anything to stop it.

His mother, weeping at the horror of it all.

Now there are many reasons why crucifixion was the means by which God chose for his son to die. But certainly one of the reasons is so that there would be no real debate over whether he actually died.

No, Jesus died. There is no doubt about that. It happened in the sight of all who wanted to watch. They were sure about it. He cried out, after being tortured for hours, and he died as his soul was torn from his flesh.

His body was wrecked. Totally broken. His lungs failed. His heart stopped. His brain ceased all function.

His dead body hung there limp and lifeless for hours, held to the piece of wood on which he hung only by the nails and rope that supported him.

Then, in the darkness, his friends came and took his body down and wrapped him in linen and spices and put his corpse in a cave, rolling a great rock over the entrance. That's how dead Jesus was.

The men who loved Jesus put his body in the ground and abandoned it to the darkness.

The sun rose the next day. Nothing. Then the sun went down. Still nothing. His body grew cold. It lay still.

But here is where things get wild and glorious.

What we believe - what we Christians actually believe - is that sometime in the early morning of the third day, the first day of the week, the day that would forever after be called the Lord's Day, the Holy Spirit fell upon the dead body of Jesus of Nazareth. His living soul returned and was united again to his flesh.

And Jesus' body, his cold, life-less flesh was suddenly warm and full of life.

And it's important to say this - we don't believe that Jesus just sort of woke up choking and coughing like someone whose heart stopped for a few minutes and somehow was resuscitated.

No, the good news that we proclaim on Easter is that this crucified man rose from the dead in majesty and power.

Jesus' flesh was still human flesh after his resurrection, certainly, but it was also totally changed. Glorious. Full of strength and bursting with complete health.

The important thing about Jesus' body after he rose from the dead is that his body was now impervious to death. It could not die again. It reigned over death and sickness and decay in a way that we can't even really fully imagine right now, having never seen such a thing with our eyes.

And two thousand years later we believe that Jesus' same resurrected body is in heaven at God's right hand - just as perfect and glorious and strong as the day he stepped out of the tomb.

Having died once, he will never die again.

That's what we believe regarding Easter. Evil men crucified Jesus and his friends put his wrecked body in a tomb and wept for him.

But on the third day the Father raised Jesus from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit and made him alive again in a way that no human person has ever been alive before.

That's what we believe regarding the resurrection of Jesus. It's pretty wild when you lay it all out of the table.

Is it any wonder the men of Athens started mocking Paul when they heard what he believed regarding Jesus' resurrection? I'm pretty sure they'd mock you in the op-ed pages of most major newspapers around the world today.

I mean if what you mean by Christianity today is have a nice social ethic and be kind to those who mistreat you, and hey there's an empty tomb in the Judean countryside that no one can really explain - you might get away with that.

But if what you mean by Christianity is that you believe a crucified Jew in the first century was actually the Divine Son of God and he burst out of the grave three days after his violent death to live eternally in power and majesty and one day he will raise every human person who has ever lived from the dead and bring them before his judgment throne as their Lord and Master -- well, that's probably not going to go over very well.

But, make no mistake, what we believe regarding Easter and resurrection of Jesus is not only wild and glorious, it is also *the* fundamental tenant of our faith.

If you read the sermons of the earliest Christians in Acts, they can't stop talking about it.

According to them, Jesus' resurrection is what makes everything else we believe about Jesus to be true.

It is Jesus' resurrection that vindicates his identity as the Son of God and the power of his teaching.

It is Jesus' resurrection that turns his tragic death into the victorious conquest over our sin.

It is Jesus' resurrection that compels everyone, everywhere to submit to him as their Lord or risk his judgment.

In fact, the apostles believed that the resurrection of Jesus even radically reframed their own daily experience of the disorder and suffering and injustice of this world, and that's exactly what we see in our passage this morning.

In verse 13 of our passage, Paul writes to his readers - early Christians in the city of Corinth, and he says:

*"Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe, and we also speak."*

Now, in verse 13, where Paul refers to "what has been written," and then quotes "I believed and so I spoke" he's actually quoting from Psalm 116 where the Psalmist says that he still trusts in God even in the midst of terrible suffering and affliction.

The Psalmist trusts God in the midst of his suffering and difficulty and death, and Paul says that we - that is we Christians - also speak and believe in God's faithfulness in the same way. But why do we do this?

In verse 14, Paul answers this question - he says we believe and speak of God's goodness and faithfulness, *"knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence."*

Do you see the connection Paul is making?

He is saying that we can trust God in the midst of our suffering because we know that God will raise us from the dead just as he raised Jesus from the dead.

What Paul is saying is that all those wild things we proclaim about Jesus on Easter regarding his resurrection from the dead are also true for us.

One day, he is saying, each one of us will die just as Jesus died.

Now, our deaths will probably be much less painful and much more dignified than his crucifixion was, but still we'll be just as dead as he was. The result will be the same. Our bodies will be just as cold. Our graves will just as lonely.

But then, Paul is saying, a hundred years from now, or a thousand years from now, or ten thousand years from now, the last day will come, and God will raise our dead bodies from grave in just the same way that Jesus's body rose from the dead two thousand years ago.

Our bodies won't be forgotten - we will rise, full of glory and strength and power and health.

Our actual flesh will be resurrected just like his, and we, having died, will never die again. And we will enter the presence of God fully - body and soul, even as Jesus stands in the presence of God now.

That's what Paul is saying.

And he's not just saying that this is a true thing we should believe because it's a nice excuse to put candy in plastic eggs and get a new suit of clothes once a year, -- he is saying that this truth - this Easter promise of our future resurrection that is rooted in the reality of Jesus' historical resurrection is something that should totally reframe how we thinking about suffering and death and all the injustice and disorder of our world.

And we know that this is what Paul is arguing for, because in verses 16 and 17, Paul drops the hammer. Listen to what he writes:

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.*

"So we do not lose heart," Paul says. There's a whole world that opens up in that one sentence.

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, Paul says, and because of our resurrection to come, we do not lose heart.

Now, remember Paul was writing this at a time when where there only about ten thousand Christians in the world. Not ten thousand Christians in your city. Not ten thousand Christians in your state or nation. Ten thousand Christians in the entire world.

And the powerful elite of the Jewish nation were arranged against this tiny group of Christians and intended to destroy it wherever it spread. Paul himself had been beaten multiple times and escaped certain death more than once. And the little church in Corinth was a mess. Paganism threatened to swallow up the church if persecution didn't get it first.



Believe me, friends, Paul knew about suffering. Whatever injustice or pain or loneliness or discouragement or grief you have experienced, Paul knew those things just as well as you do.

In fact, just a few verses earlier in this chapter, Paul wrote, referring to his own experience, and the experience of these early Christians, those first men and women to believe the wild and glorious hope of Jesus' resurrection:

*"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus."*

And yet, Paul writes, because of the resurrection of Jesus, because of the good news of Easter and the good news of our own future resurrection, *we do not lose heart.*

Why Paul? Why do we not lose heart? He tells us:

*Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.*

That's resurrection talk, right there.

He acknowledges that we are dying, everyone of us. Our bodies are wasting away. But our inner self, our inner man is being renewed day by day, united as it is to the resurrected Christ.

And then Paul writes these shocking words, words that only make sense if you believe in the resurrection of the dead.

*For this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.*

*“Light momentary affliction.”* That’s how Paul describes our suffering in this life.

And Paul was not naive.

He knew what it was to suffer, what it was to actually lose everything, what it was to be imprisoned, what it was to be betrayed, what it was to grieve.

And yet he still writes:

*For this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.*

What is Paul writing about here? What is this eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison? I’ll tell you. It’s resurrection.

You see friends, Paul actually believed that the God and Father who raised the crucified Jesus from the dead would also raise him from the dead just as he had done for Jesus.

And that Easter belief profoundly changed everything for Paul.

It made him the kind of person who could describe the most excruciating forms of sufferings as merely a light momentary affliction.

Because he trusted and believed that the eternal weight of glory of an eternally resurrected body and an eternally resurrected life was waiting for him.

And of course, he learned this from Jesus.

For Jesus, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us, endured the cross and despised its shame for the joy that was set before him - he endured crucifixion because the joy of the resurrection, that eternal weight of glory - awaited him.

This, beloved, is the wild and glorious hope of Easter.

It is scandalous and it is visceral and it is better than any promise you could ever dream up on your own.

The wild and glorious hope of Easter is that the God who raised our Lord Jesus from the dead will also one day raise *you* from the dead and bring *you* with Jesus into his own presence to live forever.

And so, beloved, as Paul says: we do not lose heart.

It is a command given to us by the apostle, but it is also an invitation for to us embrace by faith this day as we commit ourselves again to the wild and glorious hope of Easter and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the face of loneliness, we do not lose heart.

In the face of injustice, we do not lose heart.

In the face of viruses and sickness, we do not lose heart.

In the face of weariness, we do not lose heart.

In the face of difficulties in our marriage, we do not lose heart.

In the face of anxieties about our children, we do not lose heart.

In the face of uncertainty about our future, we do not lose heart.

In the face of our own slow and sometimes discouraging progress toward holiness and maturity, we do not lose heart.

In the face of whatever kind of suffering you can imagine, we do not lose heart.

In the face of *death itself*, we do not lose heart.

And we do not lose heart because we truly believe that this light, momentary affliction that we call our sufferings in this life is actually preparing us to die so that we can be raised again and know in our very own resurrected bones an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison to anything we have ever known or dreamed or imagined.

So we believe, and so we also speak. For we know that he who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will raise us also with Jesus and bring us all into his very presence.

This is the wild and glorious hope of Easter. The crucified Son of God was raised by his Father out of his grave, never to die again.

And believing this wild and glorious hope is the gift by which the Spirit enables us to persevere with joy and gladness in the face of all that is wrong in this world.

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Yes, Christ is Risen, beloved. And for this reason alone, because Christ is risen, we do not lose heart.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.