

October 3, 2021 Praying God's Truth, Over My Fears 2  
Corinthians 4:16-18

In this very short passage in Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the church in Corinth, he lays out a very practical piece of teaching in times that are difficult. For the balance of the last 2 years we have been living in difficult times. We cannot deny the times are still difficult. And there are experts out there who are telling us, (and only time will tell how accurate their statements are) but some are saying that while we are making progress, the difficulties produced by the Pandemic will continue to be part of our lives for another and possibly several more years.

That makes Paul's strategy in his time of persecution, and his advice to followers of Jesus all the more important in these times and our circumstances. The question becomes "what can I do in times and circumstances that tempt us to be paralyzed by fear?" He begins with the basic insight that is the fruit of faith in Jesus. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed, day by day."

In spite of all the negative news, in spite of the persecution that has descended upon the church in his time, in spite of the fact that he is a hunted man and is fully aware it is a matter of time until the Jewish community catches him, or the Romans do, and most likely a combination of the two, where the Jewish community would catch him and turn him over to the Romans to be tried and put to death. In spite of all that he

begins this portion by saying “we do not lose heart.” I have not run out of hope. God is still God. Jesus saves. The Holy Spirit is blessing work that is being done to the glory of God. What Paul points out is the fact of what is happening.

These are the twin facts that he observes. “Outwardly we are wasting away.” It is absolutely true. We are aging. We cannot turn back the clock and become young as once we were. My joints remind me every morning that I am no longer 23 years of age. I was 23 when I began to serve Cadmus Presbyterian Church in Nestleton, Grace Church in Millbrook, and Ballyduff Presbyterian Church on Highway 35. I am no longer 29 either. I was 29 when I began to serve St. John’s in Kapuskasing and Knox Church in Cochrane. I could go 48 hours without sleep or with very little. And there were many times that I did just that. The thought of that causes me to wince today. I go to bed at 9:30 in the evening, and I awaken between 7:00 and 8:30, depending on how many times I had to get up during the night. Yes, I am getting old. Actually I am old, I am getting older. That’s the outward physical evidence. My beard is white, my hair on my head is white....what is left of it. And I do not have the physical strength I had when I began here among you, almost ten years ago.

But it is a different story when I turn to what is happening inside me. My faith has never been stronger. When I sing, for the most part, I sing praise choruses and hymns. Not because I am a minister, but because those words and that music moves me. That is where I live. It is my own opinion, and

I am biased about my opinions, but I think I have never understood more clearly what it is that lies before me. I live in the world of the Bible, Biblical truth. I expect to experience the Spirit of the Lord in the details of every day. Even when I am down, and at times I get pretty grey, in terms of my mood, it is hard for me, thank God to fail to see the light of God in the Gospel lighting my way. Even in the darkest moments I have experienced. Praise God. Last week I sang that chorus...Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord for He will lift you up, higher and higher, for he will lift you up. I believe that for myself. I believe that for you. And I believe that for the world around us...in all circumstances.

What am I trying to say? "Inwardly, I am being renewed, day by day." I have never been as strong, inwardly as I am today. That is, not I, but Christ in me. The Holy Spirit does good work. Three times in the last 5 years I went to sleep, genuinely not knowing if I would wake up. And there was a marvelous peace about that. Do not misunderstand. It is not that I did not care what happened, I did care. My confidence was in the Lord Jesus Christ, in God with me, in the Holy Spirit's comforting me. I know, I cannot go on forever. I know that I am closer to the finish line of my race, my journey than I have ever been. But more importantly I know this...Jesus loves me. The Biblical word is trustworthy. And when I am tempted to be afraid, it is to the word written that I turn in search of the presence of Christ.

What we do together, and worship, the word, prayer and praise and the sacramental celebrations, put things in perspective. The troubles and problems of our time in this world are very real. They are also very temporary. What Paul says is that the light of God overcomes the darkness in the midst of which we journey and live. In fact it is true that you can only see the light because there is darkness to expose the power of the light. And the glory of God in the midst of our experiences, outweighs the trouble, the problems, the physical pain which so much a piece of growing older.

Last week's reading referred to the problem of being double-minded. I used the illustration of wanting our cake and eating it too. Well, just as James said, Paul says something similar. James called us to be single-minded..."Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord." Paul says it this way. "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen." And he is not saying something fuzzy about packing up our troubles in a kit bag and marching on. He is saying fix your eyes on God. On Jesus. On the Spirit of God who is with you. What does God want you to do, in spite of everything you can see, touch, taste, feel, understand. What does Jesus want you to do? Where does Jesus want you to be?

As we engage in that perspective, we move from a focus on what is temporary and changing and passing away, to a focus on God who is eternal, and who is leading us toward the reality of eternal life. Not very long ago I had the privilege of conducting a service burying the remains of a friend. He had

battled with cancer. And he died. It came to light he had been reading his Bible a lot during his struggle with terminal illness. And he had placed a check mark beside the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. "The Lord is my shepherd...I shall not want...Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear, for thou art with me."

I wept at the graveside of a friend. My friend however had fixed his eyes on the unseen and the eternal. Who is this shepherd of love, Saviour, and Lord, and Guide? That line comes from one of the praise choruses I sing when I play my guitar. "You sought and found me, placed around me, strong arms to carry me home." It is a praise song about Jesus. About the good shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep who are safe to go looking for the one that is lost on the hills. Lost and vulnerable. And the good shepherd who is Jesus brings that lost lamb home. You have seen the pictures in some of your Bibles. You have seen the stained glass windows in some churches. You have heard the words of Jesus here in this place in the midst of worship.

In worship we focus attention, we fix our eyes on that which is eternal, God the awaiting Father, Jesus HIS son, in the world in flesh and blood, HIS Spirit, moving us, leading us, guiding us. This is what matters. This is what we will see lasts. And lasts forever. So....let us pray God's truth over our fears.

Heavenly Father, we appreciate YOU. Son of God, Jesus, what a blessing you are. Spirit of the Lord, YOU are with us and in us,

before us and behind us. To you alone our praise and our worship is due. It is obvious that we live in troubled times. It is also obvious we are tempted to focus on our problems, our troubles, our pain. One of the things we here have in common is that we are older than once we were. Grant us the faith that does not lose heart. That focuses on the promises of YOUR word written. While we live in the world grant that we might see beyond it. While we are aging, and wasting away, help us to see through that process. Help us to fix our eyes on YOU, YOUR love, YOUR saving, amazing grace. When it is time, and grant us patience in the interim, energy to do what we can, when it is time, grant that we may see that glory that outweighs all of our troubles. In Jesus name we pray. Amen