

June 13, 2021

Third Sunday After Pentecost

“Looking to be Swallowed Up”

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

I recently posted on Facebook, “I have no frame of reference to judge if a new ache or pain is something serious or just me getting old because I’ve never been this old before.” These days an ache or pain regularly accompanies certain actions, extreme actions like getting out of bed, reaching for my coffee, breathing. As we age our bodies start wearing out, stupid things we did with our bodies in our youth start catching up to us, and our bodies hurt and ache and we groan. If you’re like me you have moments when you long to be young again, or at least you covet that body the younger you possessed. And I’m not saying that feeling that way is sinful, though we probably could make it so. But according to St. Paul, we believers in Christ really should be taking things in the other direction.

“We know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, 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 put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”

The tent Paul is talking about is our earthly body and/or earthly life. This interpretation makes sense because God’s Word assures us that on the Last Day all who are in Christ Jesus are raised with a transformed and glorified heavenly body—that would be our new house eternal in the heavens. And *“He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”*

In that Spirit we *“walk by faith, not by sight”* looking forward to that which is to come, living for *“Him who for their sake died and was raised”* to purchase for us this grand, blissful eternal dwelling in the presence and glory of God. Or at least we should walk in such faith.

Sometimes we forget what this earthly body really is—a tent-like thing. Tent are tents. They’re good dwellings...but only for a time. They don’t last. In enduring the elements and nasty weather and long use over years a tent wears out, decays and eventually falls apart. A tent has an end date.

Yet when it comes to our own bodies and earthly lives I think we start feeling that our tent is supposed to be a grand and enduring thing, like in the movies where a sheik has a tent-dwelling of 2000 square feet made of pristine and colorful fabric adorned with every pleasantry and convenience one could imagine. Let’s be real—you and I do quite well at filling our tent here on earth with toys and leisure and adornments and what not. And when things don’t go our way, when the fabric starts fraying, the colors fade when things break and we suffer pain and loss—our groaning is in the wrong direction! We moan about losing the tent—the tent that was never going to last. We grieve for the life that was always broken and fading away.

Folks, we need to step back and take a look at the reality of this earthly body and life—this reality compared to the design for us that God had at the beginning of creation and has for us in the eternity yet to come. I don’t care how many toys and luxuries you have; I don’t care how many square feet or bathrooms your house has, I don’t care how beautiful or healthy your body many be, I don’t care how blessed and happy your life might be right now: compared to what God has prepared for you in Christ do you know what your present tent truly is?

Have you seen the pictures of those homeless encampments in America's major cities today? You know, those grimy, falling-apart pup tents and cardboard lean-two communities filled with the mentally ill, the addicted, the forsaken, and the downright evil? By comparison, that is what your sinful life in a broken world amounts to. It's a cesspool compared to what is to come. There is no comparison.

Don't get me wrong. There are lots of blessing and joys in this tent for which we owe God praise and thanksgiving. In Christ we have joy in this tent and share it with those around us and make the best of things serving God and neighbor. This is good and right and we seek a life of peace and contentment here awaiting the Day of the Lord. But there is no comparison.

When this world brings us pain or sorrow or loss, as it inevitably will, if we groan toward the world, longing to hold onto that which is broken and has always been fading away, our groaning is in the wrong direction. That's like crying about losing the pop-up tent in the encampment under the bridge as you're headed to a suite at the Ritz! Yet we often look at things wrongly, loving this life so much because we see the death at our end date as the end of things, and so we place utmost value on the earthly things of this life we enjoy before we get there. Paul explains that the value of what comes next is the priceless treasure: "That we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." Life is not what we lose, but what we have inherited through Christ's resurrection!

No, when this world makes us groan, that groan should be toward the risen Christ—the King and Savior who delivers us from this world of sin, sorrow and death to that which is infinitely better. We have received the promise of paradise in God's presence. Christ's cross and tomb has accomplished the forgiveness of the sins that kept us apart. The Holy Spirit has called us to follow Christ's way through death to this life, this house eternal in the heavens. Knowing the bliss ahead, we should groan for the trip to be accomplished and our redemption made complete!

This is kind of a critical point, because the direction we groan toward is an indicator of who or what we serve. If my groaning is all aimed at the world, lamenting the loss that was always in the cards, then where have I placed my hope, comfort and trust? It's in the world and I'm worshiping the fallen creation rather than the holy Creator! But if in the midst of our trials, losses and afflictions we're looking to our true release from them to paradise with Jesus, then we are of good courage because God is gracious, life is eternal, and our loss of the world is gain of the kingdom of heaven.

Are you groaning in the right direction? It's a serious question because you can't really ignore the note of judgment Paul writes: "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*"

So use your body to keep focused on the kingdom that is your present reality in Christ and your destination as you walk in His way. It's great to be here in church, nourished for the journey with His Word and Sacrament. But daily be in the prayer and study of the Word that pulls your mind from the world and reorients it toward the promises fulfilled and being fulfilled in Christ.

And mind your groaning. The next time your knee or hip aches or some circumstance of the world goes awry and you groan, "Why is this happening to me?" Know the answer: It's just the broken and fading world being all broken and fading. It's what it does, and you simply can't trust it. Let that truth remind you of the one you can trust because His promises are true and are

forever. His promise is that your mortal body, your temporary tent, will one day be swallowed up by glorious, glorious life.
Amen.