

June 10, 2018  
Third Sunday After Pentecost

“The Reality You Trust”

2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1

So, what have you been worrying about this week? Has there been one major issue that has occupied your thoughts, or are there several points of anxiousness you’ve been juggling these past few days? There may be some blessed folks here who can honestly say “Nope, nothing”. But if you’re like me, even during the best week my mind finds trouble to disquiet my thoughts. Usually the fallen world puts plenty to worry about right in my path.

Well, whatever it is that has you worried, St. Paul has some words of comfort. I’ll paraphrase. “Meh. It’ll pass. And it’s good for you. It’s taking you to God’s glory.”

Gee, thanks Paul. Of course, St. Paul puts it more eloquently, but that’s how he can come across to someone in the midst of a personal crisis. *“For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us 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.”*

Few crises seem like “slight momentary afflictions to us.” Not being able to pay the rent or buy groceries is a big deal. Discord, strife, violence or addiction in your family is a big deal. A debilitating injury or disease is a big deal. Dying is a big deal. And yet Paul would term all of these “a slight momentary affliction.”

How? Paul is aware that we who believe know that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us into His presence. We are a people living in two realities at once! Paul writes, *“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.”*

The outer nature is what is seen, and if you look around for any length of time it becomes apparent that what is seen is definitely wasting away. Anyone who has owned a home knows this all too well. Even if you bought brand-new, stuff starts getting worn out, appliances break, the wear and tear of the elements forces repair and replacement. Our bodies are the definition of this. From birth on we are afflicted with disease, injuries and scars. The most beautiful youth today is on the way to adulthood, then middle age, then a senior, then whatever word you want to substitute for old. And we have a whole section in the newspaper chronicling those who have “wasted away” into death.

Paul explains that believers, however, *“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.”*

The unseen reality is eternal. The unseen reality is pretty much everything Paul has been talking about, every promise God has made and fulfilled in Christ; every promise being fulfilled in the gifts God gives His church today; every promise to be fulfilled when Jesus returns in glory. The unseen reality is life that is not broken, does not decay, does not end and is not estranged from a holy and righteous God.

Both the seen and the unseen are reality for us this very day. The question and the challenge for us is; where we place our trust, our hope.

Our sinful nature wants to glory in what is seen. Satan loves nothing better than when we trust in what is seen. If we are all about the reality of what is seen, how are we going to feel toward God when it all starts decaying and wasting away. We’re going to be angry at God! We’re going to think God has given us a raw deal. We’re going to consider God a nasty, horrible

deity to have given us all these earthly blessings and good times only to snatch them away again. We're going to hate God.

But the unseen reality is nothing but good news! It is the risen Christ watching over you, busting into the broken reality giving forgiveness and life by His blood on the cross! It is the Holy Spirit strengthening your faith unto life everlasting by the eternal Word. It is God at work through humble things seen, water, bread, wine, to cement your body and soul in the unseen reality of God's kingdom of light. If you're trusting and hoping in this reality, there is genuine love of God for all His goodness to you in Christ His Son. There is hope and thanksgiving for all those blessings that keep coming and will never stop.

In loving our Savior God, the fear of the decay of what is seen falls away, as St. John writes, *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit you have been made aware of both realities, the passing away reality you see, and the coming to completion in Christ reality that is unseen. On which one will you focus? In which will you trust?

When it comes to this question, I'm pretty sure that Christians don't choose the seen reality of the world. But I'd bet that a lot of us try to strike some kind of balance between the two. That's like trying to fish with one foot resting in the boat and the other on a termite infested dock—it's not a firm footing at all and Holy Scripture is pretty clear about that. James writes, *"Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God?"* St. John writes, *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* And Jesus Christ Himself said lots of tough things about loving the world like, *"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."*

Our Divine Creator has made us to exist in these two realities at once, but our trust and hope should only be in the unseen reality gifted us in our Holy Baptism, the reality of Jesus Christ.

The seen reality, yes, that is also a gift, a gift we manage to the best of our ability to the glory of God. It is a gift we take joy and happiness in and return thanks to God for such wonderful things. But it is a reality that is fallen and passing away, so we strive to prosper in love toward God and neighbor and endure the hardships in faithful expectation of the yet unseen better reality to come.

St. Paul writes, *"For 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."*

The hardships of this life, as horrible as they be, are indeed a slight, momentary affliction because they are taking place in the tent, not your eternal home. Strive to keep the struggles of your earthly life, and your earthly death, in proper perspective. They are the seen things of a reality that is now and has always been passing away. Endure this reality, but put your hope in the reality unseen. Put your trust in the eternal Christ who has already paved the way through death for you to the present and eternal reality of life in Him.

Amen.