

The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

June 24, 2012

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

It is camping season. Today, many people use great big campers or stay in cottages and call it camping, but when I was a kid when we camped somewhere it meant we were sleeping in a tent. It can be kind of fun to sleep in a tent on occasion, can't it? Perhaps some kids still do what we did as kids and even put up a tent up in the backyard to sleep. While a tent can be fun to stay in once in a while, I don't know if any of us would want to live in one permanently. When it gets extremely cold or hot staying in a tent is not very pleasant. When there are storms and rainy nights sleeping in a tent can be downright miserable. A tent is weak, fragile, and not meant to be a permanent dwelling.

The apostle Paul refers to our lives here on earth with this picture of a tent. Our bodies and our earthly lives will not last. We are weak and fragile. Our life here is the very definition of something temporary. Recently, I was talking to someone who said, "*Pastor, you spend all your life working and planning what you think your life will be like and then it ends up like this where you get old and everything is taken away. There has got to be more than this!*" Thankfully, this person was encouraged when I gave a gentle reminder that this new home and place in which this person was not very happy was only temporary, for God has waiting for us the only place that will be permanent. I pray we all find the same hope and encouragement this morning from this Word of God. I pray as we meditate on these words written by the apostle Paul we realize that: **Faith trusts there is more to life than this! There is more because we have an eternal house in heaven. There is more because we have a reason to live right now.**

Paul's words continue the thought of our second reading from last week where he wrote that we do not lose heart. Even though outwardly we are wasting away, God's Word and promises renew us day by day as we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but unseen for what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal. Paul goes on: "*Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.*" Isn't this an awesome reminder? Whenever this life here on earth, this temporary earthly tent, is taken away from us, we have something better in store for us. We have a life that will never be taken away and a permanent home – and eternal house in heaven. This is

a home Jesus has won for us by His life and death and resurrection. This is an inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade and a mansion with many rooms Jesus is preparing for us.

Paul wants us to consider how much better this will be than the earthly tent we have now. ***“Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”*** What is life like here on this sinful earth? Does Paul describe it accurately when he says ***“we groan and are burdened?”*** When we get sick, when our bodies get older and we start to feel the aches and pains, when we have to say good-bye to loved ones as we place them into the grave these words are very accurate.

Life is filled with pain, and grief, and suffering, and sadness, and loss. Life is filled with headaches and heartaches. Life is very brief and fleeting. Life is like this because our earthly lives are full and filled with the effects of sin – our sins and others. And if all our focus is on this life we too might ask if there is more to life than this. Thankfully we live by faith and not by sight. Faith trusts there is more to life than this! God reminds us there is because right now we are in tents, in bodies that are mortal and in homes and places that are temporary. But we will one day be in our heavenly dwelling – a perfect home without sin - an eternal house built by God. We will have bodies that will no longer be mortal. Clothed in Jesus’ righteousness through faith we will stand before God and be given glorious bodies for our new home – bodies that will be raised in power and glory and clothed in immortality.

To bring us more comfort Paul adds: ***“Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.”*** Is there any doubt that this is what God wants for us, for us to dwell with Him in heaven? If there ever is any doubt all you need to do is look daily to the cross to see just how much God wanted heaven to be your home. Remember how your Savior suffered for your sins. Recall how Jesus shed His innocent and precious blood and how He gave His life as payment for all your sin and as your entrance price into heaven. Recognize that Jesus’ grave is empty because God accepted that payment in your place. Revisit how God came to you through His Word and through the Sacrament of baptism to bring you to faith in Jesus. He gave you His Holy Spirit, literally the Greek word here is that of a down payment. He put the Spirit in you guaranteeing He will come back for you.

Faith trusts there is more to life than this – what we have and see now – we have far better home with the Lord in heaven. So we ***“live by faith, not by sight.”*** Paul summarizes well here what it is to live by faith, what the Christian life is really all about. ***“So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.”*** Our goal in life changes completely when we are brought to saving faith in Jesus. We recognize there is more to life than making money, or having the most friends, or attaining for ourselves the most power, fame, or glory. There is more to life than fancy cars, extravagant houses, and an abundance of possessions. There is more to life than serving ourselves in an endless pursuit of temporary pleasure and happiness. Now, our life has a much higher purpose. Our goal is to please our God and bring glory to His Holy Name. The Christian life is one of thanking Jesus by what we do and say for what He did for us to win us heaven.

We do not know how much time we have left here on earth to please our God. ***“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”*** The day is coming when every

person of all time will stand before Christ to be judged. No one will escape this final judgment. We also will stand before Jesus. Please understand once again what Paul is and is not saying here. He is not saying people will go to heaven based on whether they are good or bad, whether they did good things on earth or bad things. That would contradict everything else Paul had written about being saved by grace alone through faith alone. Also the Greek leaves it open whether the good or bad is what people will get on Judgment day – good things or bad things or whether it is the actions of the people. On Judgment day we know that only faith in Jesus saves, but Jesus will also point to fruits of faith as evidence that we belong to Him. He will credit anything done in love for Him to our account. This gives us once again all the more reason to live for Jesus, to live by faith and not by sight, doesn't it?

Did you ever hear the story about the retiree who built the boat in his basement? He always wanted a big fishing boat when he retired so He got to work all through the winter so it would be ready. Consulting plans spread across his workbench. He put in hours carefully sawing, sanding, and varnishing each piece of wood before joyfully joining them together as this boat he dreamed about his entire lifetime started to become a reality in front of his eyes. Everything seemed great except for the fact he was so busy figuring dimensions for each piece of wood he held in his hand, he never looked ahead to calculate the size of his whole boat. So when this man was ready to tow his life's dream to a lake, he suddenly realized his boat was far too big to ever move through any door or window. He was stuck with a boat in a basement. We, like this man's neighbors, might laugh at someone who could be so shortsighted. We may wonder how someone could get so wrapped up in today that they forget all about tomorrow.

Dear friends, this is the gentle reminder we have before us today. How shortsighted is it to spend almost all our time and all of our priorities on our earthly tents, on our lives here on earth, only to ignore our eternal house with the Lord. Yes, we may enjoy our earthly tents for a while and that too is a gift from God, but it is shortsighted if we do not see our earthly lives as temporary. How shortsighted is it to despair over what we have now as outwardly we waste away, when we are promised the never ending glory of new bodies in our new home in heaven. How shortsighted is it to live for ourselves when only what is done for God will last. That is why the Lord teaches us again this valuable lesson that there is more to life than this! May God give us the strength to always have the faith to believe it and live it! Amen.