

The 2nd Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: June 6, 2021

2Corinthians 4: 13- 5:1 & Mark 3: 20-35:

Do not lose heart. Focus on the tasks at hand

Preached

By

The Rev. John E. Higginbotham+

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, I have a question for you? Who is the “real” Jesus? How hard is it for us to see Jesus as a real person who felt sadness, happiness, grief, joy, who experienced laughter, who joked with his disciplines, who got angry. He was a man who could wrestle with his own pain? And, yet, if we don’t recognize this Jesus, then we lose the gift that God gave to us in the reality of the fully human being and (not just the divine) Son. Watching the way Jesus handles his own struggles, reveals his own humanness, can help us to recognize and accept our own.

In preparation for this sermon, I found the scriptures we read, for this morning seeing a very human Jesus in Mark’s Gospel, and St. Paul writing the following, about our humanity when he says, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what

is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

St. Paul knew what it was like to have status and success particularly in the religious community. It is most important to know that St. Paul was the founder of the church. And, Paul also knew what it was like to lose that status and success as well as everything else that defined him once he committed himself to following Jesus. St. Paul knew that life tends to hit us, punch us, even slam us to the ground when we try to make a significant change in our life. But we are not a bunch of toy ‘Weebles.’ We aren’t guaranteed to bounce back up when we get knocked down. We need help to get up. In Paul’s Second to the Corinthians, Paul shares with us the secret of strength and resilience and even joy in the face of hardships and troubles.

First, Paul is saying, don’t allow discouragement to defeat you when hardships and troubles come. St. Paul writes, “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day.” He means by the “outer nature wasting away,” that life is taking its toll, physically, emotionally and mentally. St. Paul knew what it was to face hardship, and he knew what those hardships could do to us.

As someone has said, “If no one knows the trouble you’ve seen, then you have had a face-lift.” And it’s true. Life takes its toll. You may remember a delightful story that former heavy-weight boxer James (Quick) Tillis used to tell on himself. Tillis was a cowboy and actor besides being a boxer. He grew up in Oklahoma but fought out of Chicago in the early 1980s. He says he still remembers his first day in the Windy City after his arrival from Tulsa.

Tillis says the following, “I got off the bus with two cardboard suitcases under my arms in downtown Chicago and stopped in front of the Sears Tower. I put my suitcases down, and I looked up at the Tower and I said to myself, ‘I’m going to conquer Chicago.’” Then he adds, “When I looked down, the suitcases were gone.”

We all have days like that. Life is hard sometimes. It’s easy to get discouraged. The secret to a successful life is, as St. Paul says, “Do not lose heart.” In other words, don’t give up! Hang in there and give God a chance to help you to victory.

Think about St. Paul’s life. He was beaten, stoned, imprisoned, shipwrecked, starved, and rejected. And yet Paul said that his sufferings were nothing compared to the glory that would come. As he says to us in today’s lesson: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet

inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

In other words, Paul never gave up or got discouraged. He believed that something great was in his future. God's glory revealed in him. Perhaps it feels to you as if your life has been nothing but a long hard slog. Let me encourage you today. Don't give up.” Some of the greatest accomplishments have been made by people just like you and me, who simply gritted their teeth and held on.

Let me tell you a story about a young man like that. Back in the 1970s, there was a young Canadian athlete named Terry Fox who was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, an aggressive bone cancer. Terry was only 18 years old when doctors had to amputate one of his legs above the knee. If you were in Terry's shoes, would you be bitter? Worried? Hopeless? Instead of giving in to his emotions, Terry determined that he would learn to live a full life with his prosthetic leg. Terry set a goal of running across Canada to raise money for cancer research. He called it his 'Marathon of Hope.' His dream was to raise \$1 million dollars for Canadian cancer research institutes. On April 12, 1980,

he set out from Newfoundland, an island at the easternmost edge of Canada. Every day, he ran almost a complete marathon, on a prosthetic leg. And something remarkable happened. News of Terry Fox's Marathon of Hope united Canadian citizens in an amazing way. People across the country were cheering him on, following his route, donating money to cancer research. Terry made it for 143 days before his body started to give out. Tragically, the cancer had spread to his lungs. Terry died on June 28, 1981, at the age of 22. He never made it to the westernmost coast of Canada. Nevertheless, even though he didn't complete his race, he did reach his goal. Terry didn't just raise \$1 million dollars for cancer research. He raised \$24.1 million dollars, one dollar for every Canadian citizen at the time. And today, people across Canada and around the world still hold a Terry Fox Run every year. Since 1981, the Terry Fox Foundation has raised hundreds of millions of dollars for cancer research. In 1999, Terry Fox was chosen as Canada's Greatest Hero, and he has been inducted into the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame, all because he refused to give up. If you want to know more about Terry, by the way, go to YouTube and simply type in Terry Fox. You will find several inspiring videos on his life including a full motion picture.

“Therefore, my sisters and brothers in Christ, we Christians do not lose heart,” wrote St. Paul, “Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet

inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” Physically, Terry Fox did waste away, but, by the grace of God, emotionally and spiritually he was able to inspire an entire nation. How? Terry’s brother, Fred, explains that Terry had become a Christian, and his faith drove him to live such a purposeful life. He chose to trust his future to God. Terry was propelled by that which was unseen.

St. Paul was also looking toward those things as, yet unseen. This hope kept him from losing heart. Belief in God will do that. That is the first step we need to take to keep from losing heart, to strengthen the inner person while the outer person is wasting away. Don’t let discouragement defeat you.

The second step is to focus on the tasks at hand. Wise people learn to let go of both their regrets about the past and their anxieties about the future, and to concentrate on those necessary things that must be done today.

I truly believe that it’s too late to do anything about the past and remember, the past no longer exists. And who knows what tomorrow will bring? Besides, tomorrow will be determined at least in part by how we perform today. So, let’s shut the door on the past and leave the future to God, and let’s make today a purposeful and productive one. How do we strengthen the inner person? Do not lose heart. Focus on the tasks at hand.

Aboard my first ship, I met a Marine who won the Silver Star for his bravery. He told me his story. When he arrived home from Viet Nam, he left the Marine Corps and enlisted in the Navy. I commented that it must have been very difficult to serve the nation while fighting a very unpopular war while missing his family back home. The ex- Marine said, “No, John. We were taught never to think of what might never be, but to be fully available right where we are.”

What a powerful life lesson that is, be fully available right now where you are. How much more effective would you be if you practiced being fully available in the present? My sisters and brothers, how could God use you if you gave yourself fully to the relationships and opportunities that are right in front of you right now? What could God reveal to you, if you believed that God is working in the unseen things right now in your life? That question leads us to the third way that we can keep going when life’s troubles come. The essential key, of course, is to trust in our Heavenly Father.

You cannot lose if you put yourself completely in God’s hands.” No one can imagine the lives that can be changed and that will be changed because of your trust and obedience to God’s vision for your life.

So, here is the challenge for this week, this second Sunday after Pentecost, “Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” We cannot stop the “wasting away.” We are all hit with the burdens of life. We are all knocked down sometimes. But believers in Jesus do not lose heart. Like the toy, ‘Weebles’ we wobble, but we won’t fall down! There is no burden God will not help us carry. There is no valley through which we walk that He will not walk with us. Do not lose heart. Even as life takes its toll on our outer person, the inner person can ever be made strong. Don’t let discouragement defeat you. Focus on the tasks at hand. Trust in your Heavenly Father. And know that He loves and cares for you by your wildest imaginations. Do these things and you will be renewed inwardly day by day until the day you see God face to face.

AMEN.