

**Seeing Beyond Suffering**

COMMUNION

June 6, 2021

**2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1**

*<sup>13</sup> But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture — "I believed, and so I spoke" — we also believe, and so we speak, <sup>14</sup> because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. <sup>15</sup> Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.*

*<sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, <sup>18</sup> because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal...<sup>1</sup> For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*



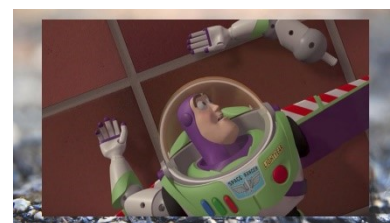
Last Sunday we touched on the idea that faith is not always easy – neither is life. All of us will suffer and have times of trial, whether we are a believer or non-believer. The reality for all of us is that sometimes life will break us down, will bring us to our knees. Today we receive words of hope from Paul as he reminds us that the inner life is being renewed daily. As we begin, let us pray...

One of the characters in the movie, Toy Story, is Buzz Lightyear, a new toy to Andy's room. Buzz is an astronaut, with a lot of neat things attached to him. If you recall, Buzz comes into the other toys' lives thinking that there are no other Buzz Lightyears around. He thinks he is the only one. Woody, a cowboy toy, and Andy's favorite tries to convince him that he is only a toy not the character that he says he is.



As the movie progresses, Buzz and Woody find themselves next door at Sid's house. Sid is a little boy who likes to blow up toys. During an attempted escape Buzz runs into a room where the TV on. Buzz walks into the room at the very moment an Al's Toy Barn commercial comes on about a big sale on the new Buzz Lightyear toys. As he watches the commercial, he begins to realize that he is not who he thinks that he is.

He walks out of the room, in a state of shock and dismay, and finds himself at the top of the stairs. He deploys his wings, and in what turns out to be a final attempt at trying to prove that he is Buzz Lightyear, he tries to fly. He sails into the air, at first thinking he can fly. But the action moves into slow motion, As Buzz falls, the expression on his face changes to a grimace that fades as he crashes at the bottom of the stairs. As he lands, one of his arms comes off. The camera pulls back show Buzz lying there, looking at his arm. He realizes that he is broken and that he cannot fix himself.



One of the painful realities of this life is that we all come to sooner or later is that we cannot fix ourselves nor, despite the illusion that we think we can, we cannot fix one another either. We are broken. We are in need of a repair that we cannot make ourselves. Try as we might, we simply cannot fix ourselves.



Seeing Beyond Suffering

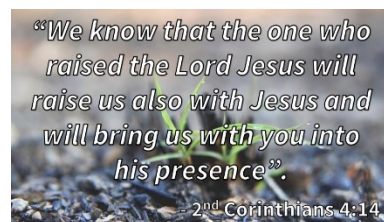
In our passage from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Paul reminds us that we are broken, that we face affliction, that we are wasting away. Paul reminds us that in the day to day of life, we will suffer. But Paul also reminds us that suffering is not *all* there is. Paul reminds us today that God offers more. Through faith, we experience life beyond the suffering. This is the life that Paul calls us towards – towards seeing beyond the suffering. In faith, we are called to experience new life that can be seen and embraced through our relationship with Jesus Christ. As we begin to explore the life offered through Christ amidst the suffering and trials of life, I invite you to turn with me to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4.

To see and embrace this perspective of life beyond suffering, we must begin with a spirit of faith. In verse 13 Paul writes, *"We have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture"*. As we delve into the scriptures, over and over again, we see examples of faith that triumphs over suffering and trial and hardship. Whether it is the story of God redeeming David in the aftermath of his affair with Bathsheba and the loss of their child or whether it is the story of Daniel being saved from the mouths of lions or whether it is one of dozens of stories of Jesus bringing healing and wholeness to one in need, the Bible is full of stories of redemption and restoration.

Yes, the world brings its share of suffering to people's lives, but God's power always speaks the last word, whether here and now or in the life to come.

As we journey in faith and as we mature in faith, this spirit of faith that grows within each of us prompts us to *"believe and to speak"* – to finally voice externally what we come to know and believe internally. For Paul, and for us, this belief is ultimately grounded in the knowledge that the same power that raised Jesus from the grave will also one day raise us from the grave. Yet in the day to day, in the place that suffering is most difficult to overcome, the story of God's love for you and me, the Bible, pours out testimony to the power of God. In the same way, as you and I have walked through the valleys, we have come to know the power of God to redeem and to restore us.

In verse fourteen Paul speaks of this power. Here he writes, *"We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will bring us with*



*you into his presence"*. In faith we believe this promise. In faith we hold onto this in times of suffering and trial. It is the forever promise of our faith. Yet part of our reality is that to rise, or to be born anew for that matter, this process involves death. We cannot be made new, we cannot be raised to eternal life, to resurrection, without first experiencing death. Resurrection is filled with hope and promise. Absolutely. But the day to day dying to self, the frequent suffering for our faith, these are real struggles that we face in this life. For Paul, for the church in Corinth, for the church in many parts of the world today, and sometimes for the faith that you and I hold – keeping a spirit of faith is the key to enduring the struggles and hardships that will certainly come.



When we see or experience suffering firsthand or in the world, all of us want to make sense of the suffering. It is natural to try and make sense of the suffering in light of God's goodness and love. The goodness and love that

God planted in our hearts wants to see beyond the suffering, to see the other side, so to speak. Too many times, though, we seek to take the easy way, offering platitudes like "God never gives us more than we can bear" or "God needed another angel" or "suffering builds character". These phrases and others like them dismiss the other's feelings and experience. Words like these can even belittle or anger or cause further harm the one receiving them. When we choose to speak words like these we are limiting or boxing God into far too small of a box.

For my last two years in Winner, I helped to lead a grief group. This multi-denominational group met in the basement meeting room at the library. We used this excellent resource, [Beyond the Broken Heart](#). Both years the group started the same – pretty quiet. Answers to questions were usually short and there wasn't much chatting before or after the meetings themselves. But then we'd get to Chapter 3, "Yielding to Grief". The fourth section in this chapter is about receiving comfort from others amidst our grief. On page 73 author Julie Yarbrough writes this about the grieving process: "To grieve toward growth, you must forgive your would-be comforters, those who try to console you with empty words or gestures". I asked if this was hard to do. At that moment, each year, both groups became best friends. The "You couldn't believe what so-and-so said..." stories flowed from everyone there, even from those who had been really quiet up to that point.

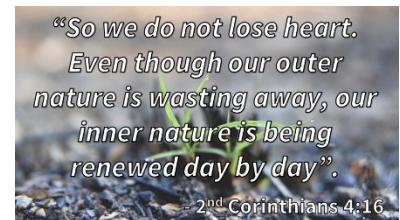
By the time I was able to reign them back in, the point was crystal clear. Platitudes and empty sayings only bring harm and not healing. A quiet and assuring presence is sometimes the greatest gift we can give to someone who is in a time of trial or suffering. It can be infuriating and defeating to hear others tell you how you should feel or how you should get over it or how you should be dealing with the suffering in your life. Anyone had this experience?

The desire to make sense of suffering is nothing new. Throughout the ages human beings have sought to make sense of it, to somehow align suffering with the will or ways of the God or gods that they worship. As people of faith we must reckon our relationship with God to the real suffering in the world and in our lives. We soon learn through experience that faith is not a means to escape hardship or hurt or suffering. At times our faith will even bring these things upon us. There will be times being faithful brings us suffering. There will be times when being faithful will bring us into places of suffering. In our passage today, Paul is not trying to minimize or to provide guidance for ways to eliminate or avoid suffering. Paul himself experienced much suffering and saw it as a way to express his faithfulness to Jesus Christ, as a way to advance the gospel. Paul shares with us today the internal spirit and mindset that allows us or enables us to face suffering with courage and strength.

Having an internal spirit and/or a focus on God does not end our suffering or remove the difficulty that we are facing. But the Holy Spirit, God's divine presence, will guide our understanding of suffering and hardship. From one looking into our suffering or hardship from the outside, nothing would appear to change on the surface.

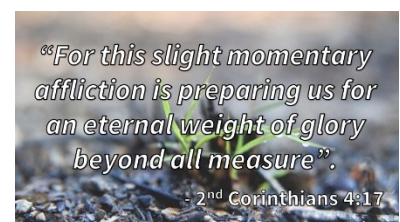
The grief or unwanted change or trial that we are enduring still persists from the outside perspective. For Paul, though, the focus in today's passage is not on the temporary situation that we are facing. Instead, Paul draws our eyes to the eternal glory of God, to the reality beyond what the world perceives. There is not a much harder time in ministry that I have experienced than planning and officiating the funeral of a non-believer. Death is simply the end. If suffering led to a loved one's death, no sense can be made of why it happened. There is a finality. There is no hope or peace or joy for their loved one or even for themselves. In these situations, they do not understand Paul's words that we find in the rest of our passage for this morning.

In this passage there is both hope for the current suffering we face as well as hope for the moment we transition from this life to the next. We begin again in verse sixteen. Here Paul writes, *"So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day"*.



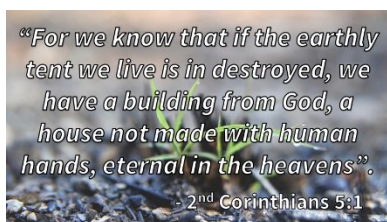
Although we face suffering, although we are each one day closer to eternity, we do not lose heart. We know from our own faith experience what Paul speaks of. Each day, when we walk faithfully with the Lord, we are renewed day by day. Each morning we experience new mercies and we become more like our Lord each day as we faithfully walk with him.

Paul also speaks of the bigger picture and what faith in this life leads to. In verse seventeen he writes, *"For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure"*.



In James 4, verse fourteen, we read these words that also point to the bigger picture: *"What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes"*. Both Paul and James look past this life. They are pointing to the bigger reality that in the grand scheme of things, my friends, our lives are but a tiny blip along God's vast timeline. These momentary afflictions will pale immensely when compared to the glory that we experience in eternity.

To me, Paul really brings it home in the first verse of chapter five. In verse five Paul writes, *"For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"*. As this is destroyed, as this breathes its last and begins to return to dust, our soul, the essence of who we are, moves on to inhabit that *"room prepared for us"* that we read about in John 14. Our new home with God is where we belong, it is where we were created to be.



Author Larry Crabb speaks of this place of belonging in his book, Inside Out. In the foreword to his book he writes this: *"Beneath the surface of everyone's life, especially the more mature, is an ache that will not go away. It can be ignored, disguised, mislabeled, or submerged by a torrent of activity, but it will not disappear. And for good reason. We were designed to enjoy a better world than this. And until that better world comes along, we will groan for what we do not have. An aching soul is evidence not of neurosis or spiritual immaturity, but of realism"*.

Deep inside each of us, we have the sense, no, we know that we were created for something better, for something more glorious, for something eternal. Living into this truth allows us to see beyond the suffering that life brings.



Seeing beyond suffering does not mean that we do not see or experience the suffering. My friends, we will all suffer. We all do suffer. Because of our faith, though,

we know that our suffering is not the last word. Seeing beyond suffering looks to our God who promises resurrection and new life one day as well as giving us the power that renews our spirits day by day, in and through all circumstances. May this be our daily and eternal hope. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) *Grow*. When have you been broken by suffering or grief? How has this experience helped your faith to grow and mature?
- 2) *Pray*. As a follower of Christ, we are called upon to surround others in prayer. Who do you know that is suffering or grieving? Pray!
- 3) *Study*. Read 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5: 2-5. What do you look forward to when you are “swallowed up by life”?