

6/17/12 Sermon – 2 Corinthians 5:1-10
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL

Grace and peace be to you all, through Jesus Christ our Savior who has clothed us with robes of His righteousness. Amen.

2 Corinthians 5:1–10 (NKJV) — 1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. **2** For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, **3** if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. **4** For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. **5** Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. **6** So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. **7** For we walk by faith, not by sight. **8** We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. **9** Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. **10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Faith Led Tent Dwellers

In Jesus' name, dear fellow pilgrim partners,

In Genesis 12 God came to Abraham, saying, **“Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.” (Genesis 12:1–2, NKJV)**

Abraham spent his whole life a nomad – a tent dweller by faith. He left home and family in the land of Ur, journeying by tent to a land unknown to him. There he remained in Canaan moving from here to there, never being able to see with his eyes the fulfillment of God's promise to give him the land of Canaan. And so we read from Hebrews 11, **“By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;” (Hebrews 11:9, NKJV)**

We walk in the footprints of Abraham. We walk those steps which are trod by faith – tracks which cannot be seen with the eye. For we too are nomads in a land foreign to us. This earthly existence among a sinful world is our own tent dwelling – a temporary home.

(v.1, 7) We are faith led tent dwellers – Longing for a permanent home.

1. Longing for a permanent home

Abraham was waiting. He knew this wandering about in tents was not all God had in store. As it says also in Hebrews, **“for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Hebrews 11:10, NKJV)**

So also we wait. We long for a permanent home. The longer we live on this earth the more we more earnestly we groan.

I'd like to tell you about Jamie. He comes to our our nursing home services once and a while – or should I say he is brought to our services. Jamie has a disease known as Hodgkin's lymphoma – Hodgkin's disease. His roommate was telling me how awful this disease is, how he wouldn't wish it on his worst enemy. This form of cancer eats away at the lymph nodes, spleen, liver, bone marrow, and other areas of the body. He can't talk, feed himself, or dress himself. Among the symptoms, Jamie has ongoing pain and fevers.

(v.2) All Jamie can do to communicate is groan. Literally. When his medication wears off he groans to get the nurses attention. Romans 8 describes this same sort of “groan” when Paul writes, **“For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. (Romans 8:22, NKJV)**

We groan, not just our of dissatisfaction or discomfort; we groan because we long for something. They say there is no known single cause for Hodgkin's disease. While there may be no medical or genetic reason for Jamie contracting this cancer, we still know the primary cause: **“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—” (Romans 5:12, NKJV)**

We rightly groan under the curse of sin. Not just because of what it has done to Jamie, but because of what it has done to us all. Where we are to be perfectly righteous, we fail. Where we are love our enemies, we hate. Where we are to trust God in the worst of circumstances, we doubt. We groan because we long for something more.

This groan is an expression of discomfort. It's like a that sound you make when you find your kids coloring on the wall: “Uuughhh.” It is a recognition of the temporary nature of this world. **(v.4)**

This longing is not a desperate attempt to abandon this world and leave Jamie behind. We do not want to be unclothed. That is the despair that leads to suicide – finding no purpose in this world, finding no hope beyond. That desire to put off this mortal body just because of the pain or sadness we feel is to walk by sight only. What despair we would find if this world was our one and only home – our permanent dwelling.

Driven by selfishness, our flesh wants only that which will please our “here” desire and satisfy our “now” demand. But it will never be satisfied. Our flesh will always want more. It longs for this world only, but we will never find fulfillment.

However, God who is rich in mercy, has laid bare our sinfulness. He has exposed our mortality. Every time you stub your toe you are reminded of this. Every time you get

frustrated with your kids or spouse or coworker, you are reminded. Every time the Word shows us how we have served our own selfish wants, how we have not loved or helped as we should, God is uncovering what must be laid bare – our moral sins.

(v.7) Like Abraham, we are faith led tent dwellers. This is what people like Jamie need to know. This is what only the Spirit can convince us of – to show us what cannot be seen. To see sin for what it really is – a curse. We are here for a time, but not staking a permanent residence. Our life in Christ always looking beyond. We are longing to be further clothed.

2. Confident of our destination

Hebrews chapter 11 may be called the dictionary of “faith.” It defines faith. It uses faith in a sentence. It demonstrates faith through example. It is there we read of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – confident of their destination: **“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” (Hebrews 11:13, NKJV) ... “But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.” (Hebrews 11:16, NKJV)**

See the confidence that these patriarchs have shown. Their whole life long God let them wander, but not wonder. Is the same true for us? Can we be confident of our destination?

(v.10). Notice the inevitability of this. It is universally true, no matter who you are, no matter whether you are rich or poor, white or black, go to church or not, we will all appear before the judgment to receive according to the things we have done, whether good or bad.

What hope is there for us? Romans 3 declares: “there is none righteous, not one.” God has laid bare our mortality. He has shown our desires. Indeed if we trust in our own life to show ourselves “good” before the judgment we can have no confidence. That is why so often when asking someone: “do you think you are going to heaven?” we hear the answer, “I think so.” or “I hope so.” Is this the level of confidence we should have?

But, v.5, **God has prepared us for this very thing. He has given us the Spirit as a guarantee** – literally, a down payment. By baptism, God has chosen you for this very redemption.

For His promise is: **“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have [been clothed with] Christ.” (Galatians 3:27)**

Jesus’ incarnation and earthly ministry is described by John: “And the Word became flesh and literally “tented” among us.” Jesus took on Himself your tent-dwelling. He never lived for a permanent earthly residence. He was the nomad of nomads – for His whole purpose was to die for your sins. In His body He bore our own sins, Peter says. We do earnestly desire to be clothed.

“and be found in [Christ Jesus], not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;” (Philippians 3:9, NKJV)

Standing in the courtroom of Christ, we wear Christ Himself. By believing in Jesus, we are clothed with robes of righteousness, so that Jesus is not just our judge, but our Advocate, as it says in John: **“... if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1 John 2:1, NKJV)**

The Spirit is described as God’s down payment, His guarantee. The Spirit is our guarantee of the deal God has struck with Himself. He has given us the first installment of blessings to insure that He will keep His promise to remove the curse of sin and give you a glorified body in your heavenly home.

So many churches emphasize looking to yourself to have this guarantee of the Spirit. It becomes about my experience and my emotion – things that are seen – rather than the solid foundation of God’s promise.

(v.7) Our confidence rests not in our words or works. We dwell in tents made by Christ. Therefore the good things we have done while in this world are made perfect by Christ. Our works are evidence of the faith that is in us. We dwell with Abraham in God’s certain promises: **“For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,” (Hebrews 6:13, NKJV)**

Now we see what Paul is talking about when He speaks of our confidence. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. To die is gain. We are confident that God has prepared us for more than just this earthly body. He longs to give us more. He promises to strip off our mortality and clothe us with immortality. When we die we will be transformed into a glorious heavenly beings with our bodies redeemed from sin and resurrected to perfection.

“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”” (1 Corinthians 15:53–54, NKJV)

Faith is confidence, and confidence sharpens our aim.

3. Aiming to please our Home Builder

The greatest athletes have something in common: confidence. In Tiger Wood’s younger days, he would tear through the competition, sometimes winning by 8-10 strokes – which in professional golfing terms is very good. He aimed with confidence. In more recent days, however, Tiger has not lived up to expectations. He lost his confidence. The archer likewise will never strike a bullseye if his nerves get the best of him and his hand is shaking.

How could we ever hope to please God if we did not have this confidence of which we just spoke? Our aim, no matter how hard we try, would always be off. We would

always miss the mark. But now that Christ has nailed the bullseye for us, what is left for us to do? Now that Jesus has sunk the hole in one, what need to we have to rely on ourselves?

(v.9) We aim to please our Home Builder. But again, this accuracy does not come with eye sight. We close our eyes to focus on the love that God has poured out on us. With eyes shut you see a heavenly mansion, a banquet hall where a name place will sit – with your name on it.

As is also written in Hebrews 11 – **“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6, NKJV)**

But by faith, we no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died for us. We aim to please, not because it earns us God’s favor, we already have that. “The things done in the body” as Paul calls it in v.10, that is – our earthly pilgrimage, our works and confession, are all clothed with Christ. We love others freely, not by constraint. We aim to please God without compulsion, but as the Spirit moves us. All these works of faith are a testimony to the hope that is in us – in every situation.

When cancer strikes, we rely on Him who loves us with everlasting love. When a loved one dies, we trust that whoever believes in Him will not die, but have everlasting life. When we lose a job, we know He has promised that the righteous will not be found begging bread. When confronted with more stress than we think we can handle, we find rest in Christ, who has carried the burden of the cross for us already, and is with us until the end of time.

As Paul also writes in Romans 8:18, **“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18, NKJV)**

All these are a testimony to the hope that is in us, hoping against hope that others would see and be led to believe.

God came to Abraham in the land of Ur telling him to take up stakes and move to a strange land. How often does God seem to pull up stakes in your life? He tells you to move on, or to face this or that challenge. He allows you to be tempted, or face a spiritual test.

(v.1, 7) May God keep us faith filled nomads – trusting in Jesus, journeying toward our real home: heaven. He has prepared us for this very thing. Hebrews 11 again speaks of us tent dwellers:

“Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.” (Hebrews 11:16, NKJV)

Jesus has gone to prepare a place for you, that where He is, you may be also. We are faith led tent dwellers. This is most certainly true. Amen.