

Eastern District LWML 2020 Summer Bible Study
Rev. John Zimmerman
Pastoral Counselor – Eastern District LWML

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! What a great proclamation of the truth. Alleluia (Praise God)! Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, being the firstfruits of the New Creation, of which you dear fellow believers in Jesus are part of, for eternity! What amazing grace and sweet truth that is!

The following is a written Bible Study for your home devotional reading as part of this odd time that we find ourselves in. This is a new one for me, I've never written a Bible Study that I couldn't deliver in-person or with any real-time verbal communication, so I ask for your grace if there are any hiccups. If you have any questions or comments, please email me at pastorzimmerman@gmail.com and I'll do my best to answer those.

I was asked to do a Bible Study from 2 Corinthians 5:6-7 (English Standard Version):
So we are always of good courage.
We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,
for we walk by faith, not by sight.

Before we go any further, let us pray:

Lord God, Heavenly Father,
We give you thanks for the gift of life and while we aren't able to meet together in New York as was originally planned, continue to strengthen the women of the Eastern District LWML in their faith and love for neighbors. Continue to shower us with your grace and forgiveness as you continue to be with us to the close of the age before you call us home to Heaven through the all-atoning sacrifice of Your Son, our Lord, Savior and Brother, Jesus.

In His Name. Amen

St. Paul wrote, "So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight." St. Paul is writing of the new life that comes from being a Christian. He gives the statement that "we are always of good courage." Well, that's kinda an odd thing to say. Where did that comment come from? Well, like many pastors remind their members in Bible Class and in sermons, check out the context of the statement from Scripture. Don't get locked into one particular verse, what's the bigger discussion going on? From above this section from 2 Corinthians 5 we hear this:

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. (2 Corinthians 5:1-5 ESV)

Our earthly bodies are tents. That's an interesting metaphor to use. What do we know about tents? They are mobile, you can take them from one place to another. They are also temporary. You tend not to bequeath a particular tent to multiple generations, unlike some family homes and farms. Look at the castles in Europe and Asia, how numerous generations of the same family have lived in them. That's the type of comparison that Paul is going for here when he speaks of the building that we have from God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. And so, we groan with the creaks and rattles of our mortal frames, our tents. We get weighed down by the earthly cares and concerns that we all deal with (e.g. relationships, budgets, family life, work issues, etc.).

St. Paul gave this statement in the quote above as well:

...but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

What is mortal, what is limited, what is fading, what is dying, will be swallowed up by eternal life. We long to put on our heavenly dwelling, our perfected bodies given by God. While we get a foretaste of that in our life together as Christians, chiefly in the Divine Service where we are fed Christ's Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins, we don't get to fully realize the joys of Heaven under we are there. And so, while we remain in this "veil of tears," we deal with some groaning.

Stop for a moment and ask yourself this question: What gets you down?

(Perhaps list some here):

Lift these concerns to God in prayer. Talk with your pastor, He's God's local helper for you. If comfortable, share your concerns with brothers and sisters in Christ to share your burdens and Lord willing, find an earthly solution to them. Not all problems will be solved this side of eternity, but know, believe and cherish that the Lord is with you always, to the close of this age (Matthew 28)!

God Himself is preparing you for Heaven. God made the world, He made you through your parents. He made you His eternal child through Baptism. Jesus promised to His disciples on Holy Thursday that He was going to the Father to prepare a place for you in Heaven and if He goes, He will come again to take you to be with Him forever (John 14).

The Holy Spirit, also called, "The Helper," is given to those of the Faith to strengthen them and as Paul wrote, as a guarantee. God, the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity is given to you and all believers to strengthen you and to feed you along your earthly journey in your tents as you walk in the Faith towards your heavenly home.

This takes us to our theme verses:

6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight.

Because we know where we are going for eternity, we are called to always be of good courage. I don't know about you, but one of the most comforting facts of being a Christian for me is this: I'm eternal in Jesus, here and now and will live with Him in Heaven forever! That is otherworldly! It's ultimate comfort. This is the Gospel message that we continue to share to all who would hear us! And yes, we get weighed down by earthly cares, but the Lord calls us to this joyous eternal hope and courage.

The front part of the second sentence of this current quote isn't the easiest to hear:

We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,
for we walk by faith, not by sight.

While we are home in our earthly bodies, home in the only existence that we know, we are away from the Lord. There is a separation there. We are still stuck in our sin-drenched mortal lives. We can't enter heaven with our sin-drenched tents. These tents must be destroyed before we enter into heaven. That's the process of earthly death, or for those who are alive at the end of earthly time, they will be gathered together into Judgement Day (see 1 Thessalonians 4).

While we are separated from the Lord while in our tents, our earthly bodies, we often feel closer to God when we are gathered with fellow believers. Why is that? While talking about dealing with one sinning against another, Jesus said this in Matthew 18: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." (Matt. 18:20) At His Ascension, He promised to never leave nor forsake His disciples (Matt. 28). In Acts 2, we hear of the joy and fellowship of the early Church:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 ESV)

There's something about meeting together in the Church, the gathering of believers. This is partly why we feel off this summer without having our semiannual Convention. Something's off. The writer to the Hebrews touches on this issue and the issue of faith in chapter 10:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:19-25 ESV)

The theme verses for this study were from 2 Corinthians 5:6-7:

So we are always of good courage.

We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.

You're called to remain faithful to the Christian Faith, to the point of death, and you will receive the crown of eternal life (Revelation 2). You're able to do so having been cleansed in the waters of Holy Baptism, and fed along your way in the Divine Services of your local congregation, the local embassies of God's Kingdom on Earth, where you are fed Christ's Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins. Amazing comfort there!

A little after our theme verse, Paul wrote this as well:

11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.

That's part of the Gospel call. Since you've been washed in the blood of the Lamb, you know the antidote to this problem called death, you go on and share the Gospel onwards in your families, social networks (in-person is often best), through your congregations, Church Bodies and through groups like the LWML.

2 Corinthians 5 began with this verse:

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed,
we have a building from God, a house not made with hands,
eternal in the heavens.

Your Faith is grounded in the fact of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His death is your death. His resurrection is the preview of your resurrection. Earthly death is but now a gloomy portal to life immortal. So, be of good cheer dear fellow Christian. Be at peace, your sins are forgiven and just assuredly as you're breathing today, you will be alive with Jesus and all of the ransomed believers from throughout time in Heaven for eternity.

Let us pray:

Lord God, Heavenly Father, as we continue to walk by faith and not by human sight, continue to strengthen the women of the Eastern District LWML. Be with them as they continue to live the Christian calling in their various vocations in house, community and in the Church. Shower them with your grace, forgiveness and continue to strengthen them in Word and Sacrament until their faith becomes sight in the presence of your glorious throne in Heaven.

In the Name of Jesus, Amen.