

“Walk By Faith”

LWML 2020 EASTERN DISTRICT CONVENTION SERMON

By Rev. Dr. Chris Wicher

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

Dear President Susan, Officers, Delegates and Friends of the Eastern District Lutheran Women's Missionary League,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Savior Jesus Christ.

Our family trip to Yellowstone in the 1990's took us far far away from home. Though it was a long trip that required 4 to 5 extensive days in the car, still, it was worth the saddle fatigue when we actually arrived and saw the sites. I'll go back again in a heartbeat. However, in my enthusiasm and excitement with each turn along the way little did I realize the toll the trip was taking on my sons. It all became real to me when we came to a rest stop along the I-90, I think it was in Wyoming. It was then, as we were looking at a very large map of the United States that particularly highlighted Interstate-90 from coast to coast, when my oldest spoke up. Was he speaking also for his brothers, I'll never know. My son declared in no uncertain terms: "I want to go home." I couldn't believe my ears but without protest I held myself together. I replied, "well, see this map? Here we are, (pointing to the place we were in Wyoming) and here is where home is (Buffalo, NY). It's a long way home, but I can say this to you. We are heading home, and with each day, every minute in the car, we are coming closer to home. But it will take us a while." He took it in stride, I think, because he never said those words again on that trip. Sure enough we got home, safe and sound, and with many memories of one great family trip to Yellowstone, the Mississippi River, the Bad Lands, Well Drug store, Devil's Tower, the Black Hills, and lots of flat land. But, there's no place like home!

“Walk by faith”. That is one amazing phrase as we, that is, you and I, walk with Jesus day by day. We walk with Jesus by faith. This life of ours is a journey. A long journey filled with incredible sights and experiences, yet fraught with dangers and downturns too. How dangerous life can be, and exciting too. The journey is no different for the Eastern District of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. It is one wonderful organization that focuses primarily on mission-support and mission-development. But it is hard work too that comes with its share of disappointments. Ladies, be honest, for all the good of this organization, have you ever asked our good Lord to bring it to a better place, a perfect place? Have you ever felt “I want to go home?” Yes, indeed, we walk by faith.

We've all had our “creepy moments”. I have and most everyone has felt that same feeling time and again. You have heard it said, maybe you said yourself “I want things the way they were. I want my family back around me. I just don't feel right in this place.” Or the one I heard a lot when I was the Pastor of congregations, “I want to be at home with the Lord.” Of course, that last one was spoken by those who wished they

would pass from this life to life eternal in the promised bliss of heaven with Jesus. And why not? Think of the splendor, the eternal peace, the joy to come!!

The words of Psalm 39:12 ring loud and clear “I am Thy passing guest, a stranger like my fathers before me.”

St. Paul felt that way too. The sentiment of your convention text, 2 Corinthians 5:6-7, is not entirely one of surrender. A first glance alone may leave the theme misinterpreted. Look closer at the words. They are not a yearning to turn the clock back. “We walk by faith” carries strength and determination. A shout at the top of our lungs “let’s live life now!” But that is not to say St. Paul never felt a total yearning to die and be with Jesus which would be far better. Do you remember the time, the other place in his writings when he said so?

Try Philippians 1:21-22. There, he struggled. Should I stay or will I leave to be with Jesus, that was his struggle at the time. Those words read, “I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better, but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.” Here is a man who said it would be better all-around for me to die and be with Jesus, but it is far more important for the faith of you, the Philippian Christians, that I remain in my apostolic relationship with you. So, which is it going to be?

But that’s not Paul here in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. That’s not his sentiment here. No, this portion of 2 Corinthians is about life in the body, an utterance of what life in the body means with all its sufferings and failing of its corruption, wracked to the core by sin. This body is our earthly tent. It will be destroyed, as we are already sensing, and it will be raised a glorious body in the resurrection. In this body, in this life, we walk with Jesus all the way. “Walk by faith” because it is a difficult journey visited with affliction. Yet, in spite of all the liabilities of life, still this body is your “home” says St. Paul. Home as you know it. Paul declares, “as long as we are at home in the body.” So this section of 2 Corinthians chapter five, gives hope and encouragement to the follower of Jesus who has a heart pining for all the comfort to come in Jesus.

## **2 Corinthians 5:6-7**

**Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight.**

...**We are confident and we know.** The word translated “confident” actually means “good cheer.” Our faith gives us “good cheer”. It makes us unsinkable. It gives us a lift of heart, body and soul. So, we are buoyant, lifted up by faith with “good cheer”. And we know this with a knowledge that is Spirit-inspired. “To know”, “knowledge” in the Scripture means not something of the head, but more of the heart. Knowing is a relationship. Knowing is a relationship we have with the Lord our God through Jesus Christ. “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Such knowledge comes through the faith that is ours in Christ Jesus. We know because we believe and we believe because it has been given to us by the Holy Spirit. Believing is seeing and not

the other way around. So, we are always of “good cheer or confident” in knowing, because of our personal relationship we have with the Lord our God through Jesus...

...**that as long as we are at home in the body.** “Body” is not the same as “flesh” in the New Testament. When the New Testament uses the word “flesh”, it sometimes carries a neutral usage, but other times it is not always a compliment. The word “body”, this flesh and blood and tissue and bone that holds our soul, we are mind-body-soul together as a whole person, this is a different matter. The body is a gift from God. Unfortunately though, the body is corrupted by sin. Sin has corrupted every nook and cranny of who we are. And what comes with sin is death, for the “wages of sin is death.” Consequently, the blessing that the body is from God to us, nevertheless, it has problems. Boy, does it ever have problems; big physical health problems that show in corrupted genetics, corrupted circumstances, and corrupted aging.

A few verses before, Paul uses a metaphor and calls our body a “tent”. When campers are through using a tent they loosen all the chords and ropes, and pull up the stakes and collapse the tent. They put it away until the next time they need it. Likewise, our bodies will collapse in time only to rise again as a new and glorious body in the resurrection. For now, while our earthly tent is still standing, we receive it as a gift from our heavenly Father. Here, in this tent, we are “at home in the body”. And such a good feeling it is. Did you know that the words “at home” in this passage are very favorable and positive and good? “At home” literally means, “the dwelling among one’s own people”. Like a good feeling you get at your family reunion (or not) or when you ZOOM family or FACETIME them because you cannot be with them in person? By the grace of our Lord we get to enjoy those moments in saying “Lord, how good it is to be here!” How good we feel, yet how strange we feel, because that place, that much better place with Jesus is still before us and we’re not quite there yet. For now, we feel like a foreigner, like someone out of place, like a stranger wandering in a strange land, this body of ours....

.... We are of good cheer and we know as long as we are at home in the body **we are away from the Lord.** It only gets better. The goodness of life in this body is amplified beyond comprehension in the Lord. How much better it will be when finally we are on that distant shore, that heavenly Jerusalem, in the bosom of Abraham, in fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in beauty sublime, and in holiness divine! I wonder if this feeling went through the heart of the prodigal son when he finally came to his senses while eating the garbage fed to the pigs and there remembered “how much better it was in my father’s house where I wined and dined on the finest of the land.” The prodigal son “wanted to go home”....

....**Live by faith.** And here are the words of your LWML Eastern District 2020 Convention theme. “Live by faith.” Faith. This is the basic principle of the Christian life. How often is this repeated in Scripture? “We are justified by faith”, “by grace are you saved through faith”, “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved”, “your faith has made you well”, “Abraham believed and God credited it to him as righteousness”. And how often is faith demonstrated in Scripture? We walk with Jesus by faith. We

don't know where He is leading us, only that He has promised to be with us in all circumstances.

I remember a study that was conducted on children years ago. The study appeared in the text for one of my college classes. Those conducting the test wanted to understand the trust level of children. Specifically they wanted to see if and when children would cross a clear glass bridge hovering over a slight valley between two platforms. So that's what they did in setting up the test area. They took a wide and sturdy piece of transparent plastic and rested one side on a platform and the other side on an opposite platform. When they placed a crawling infant on one platform and the child's mother on the far platform, the baby, without hesitating, quickly and confidently crossed over the clear surface, without regard to the sensation they were crawling over thin air, right into its mother's waiting arms. Success. However, when they did the same with older babies and children, they found that not only did they hesitate, but some of them refused to cross over the transparent bridge. Why? Well, a thought: something happens to us with aging. We become more aware of and suspicious of our surroundings. We take our eye off the goal. Our simple trust takes to flight. We grow fearful of that which is not in our control. We act safely and for self-preservation. All these are not bad things, heavens no. We do grow to understand that threats are real in life and not everything is as it seems.

But is that always wise in the Lord and is that Godly wisdom that is speaking, or is fear creeping in? "Live by faith." This is a hard lesson. This is a life-long lesson. When God speaks, we need to act. When He says "yes", it is our green light. When He says "no", then we need to put on the brakes.

Consider your life as an adventure with Jesus. It is a walk of faith filled with wonder and awe every step of the way. He has you in His hands anyway, so why not enjoy the day, the week, the year? It is not always going to be an easy journey. Your vehicle might even run out of gas along the way, but He will show you where you can fill it up again. Don't fret the small stuff, and everything is small stuff to Him who bought you and loves you and never let's you go. And, yes, there will be those losses too. But give thanks to God for those loved ones who walked on the journey with you for a time.

Like St. Paul, I'm asking you today to step out onto that glass bridge with me. Step into life, into another journey for the Eastern District Lutheran Women's Missionary League. Do you see Who is waiting for you on the other platform? Do you see like I see Him? Do you see Jesus who waits for you at the end of the journey?

Yes, "walk by faith" as your theme encourages, and not by sight.

Amen.

Now to God who is able to do incredibly more than all we can ask or conceive by the Holy Spirit at work among us. To Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus, from one generation to the next, even forevermore. Amen.