

June 16, 2024

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

“Heaven Is My Home!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A Lutheran, retired pastor I know told me that years ago he was working on a sermon. The text was our epistle lesson for today and the words of Paul: “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.” As he was working on that text, he felt an enormous pain in his chest and realized that he was suffering a massive heart attack. He made it to the hospital and upon diagnosis he expected that he would be dead in the next five minutes or so, as he put it. He felt terror but his thoughts drifted back to our epistle lesson he had been studying, and he found a sense of calm in the words of Paul and was ready to die.

He obviously did not die. But, in that moment, it was as real as it gets without actually happening. The pastor went unconscious but with medical help survived. He said to me that when he woke up he was disappointed because he went unconscious, fully expecting to be in heaven. His thoughts then drifted back to what he had experienced and he commented that, in the studying of our epistle lesson for this morning, he found great and lasting comfort in the face of death. He made the observation that Jesus was preaching to him in the Scripture to get him ready for what he must endure in the future. He saw what happened to him as a rehearsal for the day of his death. And to this day, his experience and the words of Paul in this text are his point of comfort for what he knows is soon coming and unavoidable.

Please understand that our Lord does a similar thing for all of us who are his. We all have a journey in which the Lord works to prepare us for that moment when we will be leaving this fallen world behind. Each journey is different and personally made for us but all journeys lead to the same destination. In that preparation, Jesus leads us to say: **Heaven Is My Home!** And the preparation we receive from him is found in his preaching to us in the apostolic word of Scripture with the center being the cross and the forgiveness of all our sins. Jesus did not merely die a death on the cross. He died our very death that the death we die might not be the final word on our eternity.

Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:10 that our Savior Jesus Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light! By his glorious resurrection from the dead and triumphal ascension into heaven Jesus has proclaimed victory over death and hell - the death and hell we deserve. In John 11:25-26 Jesus says to us: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” And in John 14:19 our Savior comforts us with the following: “Because I live, you also will live.” The resurrection of Jesus makes it plain that what Jesus did is real and for us! What a miracle it is to be able to say with faith in Jesus: **Heaven Is My Home!**

Yes! We look forward to a happy goal at life’s end! Again, we read these words of Paul: “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.” Tents are flimsy, insecure, quickly removed. A gust of wind may blow them away or make them uninhabitable. This is what our bodies have become in this life. As it says in Psalm 103:15-16, “As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.” But why should we fret and worry? I know we do because of the nature of our sinful flesh. Lest we forget, we have the forgiveness of sins and victory

in the cross of Jesus and the empty tomb! We know that when our bodies return to dust, we have a building from God. We have a house that is not made with human hands that is here today and gone tomorrow. We have an eternal dwelling.

Gone will be the tent that is so easily blown away or made uninhabitable. What God builds for us is a permanent residence. First and foremost, our house is the house of God where God is and we with him. And our God is a powerful God, who has even promised to build us a brand new body and establish a new creation that will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual that we may receive and rejoice in all spiritual things from God who is eternal spirit. No more being alone. We will live in true love that will never fade away. This is what we mean when we say: **Heaven Is My Home!** “And I shall surely stand There at my Lord’s right hand!”

The goal of the Christian is further described in our text by yet another comforting comparison. Paul writes in verses 2-3, “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.” Heaven is like putting on a garment. In one sense, we are already clothed with Christ in our Baptism but we still long for our heavenly dwelling. Here we are once again confronted with the tension of being a Christian. By faith we have it all but we long to have the consummation of all that is ours. We long for the ultimate end of the thing. Having been clothed with Christ, we will not be found naked and ashamed. When “swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day,” we will be found to be enveloped in Jesus and everything that he brings.

But while we wait for these blessed things we are reminded by Paul that for now we groan in this fragile tent while earnestly desiring to be clothed in the house of our heavenly dwelling. And sometimes that groaning can be so very loud! So many pains and sufferings and illnesses. In this valley of the shadow of death, there are so many burdens that it would be impossible for us to list them all out. Only one thing can cheer us throughout our short life down here and in the hour of death and that is the hope that we have in Jesus who has promised - death will be swallowed up in a victory!

In Jesus, we have the real assurance that we will reach this goal. Oh, our sinful flesh may cause us to doubt and have moments of uncertainty. It isn’t beyond the possibility that we may have moments of terror. The question is: what will we do when we have those moments? Like the pastor who had his massive heart attack he went to the sure promises of God that push back doubt, uncertainty, and terror. In commenting on our epistle lesson, Luther makes the following observation in a sermon from 1533:

If you receive the Word in faith, you are given other eyes that can see through death to the resurrection and apprehend the pure thoughts and image of life. If I would judge according to my reason that I can see and understand, I should be lost. But I possess an understanding loftier than what the eyes can see and the senses feel, which faith has taught me. For there stands the text that says *Resurrexit*, “He is risen,” not for himself but for our sake, that his resurrection may be made ours, that we may also rise in him, and not remain in death and the grave, but with him may celebrate in the body an everlasting Easter (WA 37:69f.)

Indeed! We are able to say even now by faith with Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:55-58, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore ... be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

What the Christian labors for, lives for, and aims for in his entire life is that he may be acceptable to the Lord in this tent and to leave this tent behind for a heavenly dwelling. To that end, we continue in the great promises of Jesus. We gladly hear and learn from him in the reading and preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. In other words, we abide in Christ our Savior. And by the power of his undeserved kindness we continue to say **Heaven Is My Home!** We are like Abraham, as it says in Hebrews 11:9-10, who “By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”

But, in the meantime, we make it our aim to please God, as Paul says in our epistle lesson. We labor and live as Christians who are not merely sitting around and waiting to finally die or for Jesus to return. Instead, we bear witness to others so that all of God’s elect will reach the destination of heaven. Thus, we not only encourage one another while it is still today, but we bear witness to all peoples. It says in Jude:

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott