

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

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, 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. 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.

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, 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.

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.

Good morning! Jane and I are so glad to be back home in Helena. Just as a point of interest, since we originally set out on Sunday May 9th, we traveled 6,649 highway miles around the country. 4,857 of those miles were in an RV. That's an average of about 266 miles per day. During our stop in Denver, I should say during our second stop in Denver, our kids kept saying, “You know guys, there are these new things called airplanes that you might want to check out.” And you know most amazingly, after all of those miles, and after all those road hours, Jane and I can still hold hands going into Walmart this past Thursday. Thanks be to God!

In our epistle today, Paul is again writing to the troubled Church in Corinth. The first time he wrote them, it was a fairly stern letter. The problem was that the church had adopted many things from their cultural surroundings. As you probably remember, Corinth was a tough, anything goes, port city and much of that toughness and any-thing-goes-ness was overflowing into the church. Paul wrote to them in that first letter about their bickering and their acceptance of various immoral practices, things that he said even pagans wouldn't do. He reprimanded them about marriage and divorce, about how they were taking each other to court, and how idolatry had crept back into their lives. It was a tough letter, one that they needed.

Now in his second letter he softens, a bit. He recognizes their internal struggles as well as the external forces that they were contending with. Today in Chapter four, our passage starts appropriately with a reference to Psalm 116 where David was lamenting what he was up against. David's statement

was one of keeping the faith. He wrote, “I believed, even when I spoke...that I am greatly afflicted [by those around me],” even going as far as to say that all of mankind were liars.

And so, Paul takes David’s words and uses David’s faithfulness to show the Church in Corinth that they too, even in their affliction, can recognize, and hold on to, the same thing, the same recognition of faith that David did. It is an uplifting call to them to not lose heart, even in their struggle. He encourages them not give in to their context or even their own mistakes. Instead use those struggles and mistakes as tools that will serve to point them forward to a place where the eternal weight of glory through God’s grace will bring them to an amazing place, a place not worthy of even the slightest comparison to what they will be shedding.

Did you hear that in Paul’s words? When things around them are wasting away, even their physical bodies, remember, he tells them, that those outward things are not what it is all about, at least not to start. It is the inward that they need to be concerned about. It is the inward that is being renewed, day by day. Don’t lose sight of that, he is telling them. Don’t lose sight of the things that are not seen because they are letting the worldly things, the physical things, that are so prominent in their line of sight, to block their vision. He is encouraging them to shed the things that are perishing while holding on to the things that will endure. Once they do that, they will then be able to bring the eternal to bear on the transient, first within ourselves and then within the world. It is a great effort by Paul to uplift them and to call them forward. Don’t get bogged down. Remember what we are all about. Remember who we are all about.

But I also think that Paul is adding another dimension to David’s words. David was saying that he believed, his belief never waned, even when he lamented his affliction. His lamenting never caused him to let loose of the promise. And in that, David asks what he should now render as a response to all his blessings.

Paul is not missing that, but he is adding that even in our affliction, we let our belief speak, come what may. I can imagine Paul thinking back to the road to Damascus and what came after. “I believed, and so I spoke.” And now we believe; we, faithful Corinthians; we, God’s church in the world; we, St. Peter’s Cathedral in Helena, MT; we too must let our belief speak. We too must point beyond the things that are seen to the things unseen, eternal in the heavens. We too must speak Christ for our time, with all his love and all his challenge to us. We too must speak the eternal truths of Heaven into our existence, our world, our communities, into our own lives, which were made for those very truths.

So, are we ready for that? Are we ready to speak? And if we are, what does that look like?

Well, when it comes to sharing our faith, God has given followers of Christ a complex voice. When we speak, when we give witness to our faith, we do so in many different way, but there are three come to mind for me this morning.

The most obvious is that we use our actual voice. We talk about Jesus. We acknowledge the sacrifice on the cross and the amazing resurrection on Easter morning. In love, we share God’s love, both the freedoms and the boundaries for the life God created us for. I know...the world says that we

shouldn't do that. Keep faith issues to yourselves. But wouldn't that be like withholding information about a lifesaving medicine because the person who is ill thinks that all medicines are stupid, or even worse, that all medicines are harmful.

And this doesn't mean that everyone must run out and complete medical school before they can be allowed, or before they will allow themselves, to speak. We let the Spirit guide us in speaking where we can and then pointing the way to other sources when needed. A Christian voice is personal, and we must use ours.

And we must use the voice of our lives. If we are to speak, we must speak with our lives. Do our lives, what we embrace and what we reject, authentically point to Jesus? And it needs to be said that this does not mean that our lives point to certain aspects of Jesus and not others. And it does not mean that we only apply the love and truth of Jesus to those we like and not to those we don't.

We must speak through our lives the fullness of Christ. If our lives, in the end, breed division and disunity, pitting one group against another, if they don't embrace the path to reconciliation, then we are not doing it right. If our actions show love for some and not for others, then we are not doing it right. If our lives embrace the truths of fallen humanity over the Truth of our transcendent God, then we are missing the mark. If our lives speak the idolatry of lies over truth, power over humility, selfishness over generosity, then we are trying to put ourselves in God's place. If people look at us and just see a reflection of the fallen world with pretty crosses dangling around our necks, then we are sharing a dangerous message leading to the continuation of a dysfunctional existence. Our lives must speak love and truth and we will be known, the voice of our lives will be heard, by the fruit that results.

Finally, we must use the renewing voice of our worship. Every Sunday morning, every new day of Morning Prayer, every engagement of spiritual disciplines, glorifies God within our lives and speaks God's renewing presence to a world that is constantly being told the opposite. Our public worship, so long as it points to God and not to ourselves, steeps the world in the eternal. It points the world beyond those things that are passing away to the unseen things that it, and we, were made for. It is in our faithful worship, maybe most powerfully, that we find from God our voice, both our inner voice as well as our voice for the world.

We believed... we believe... and so, we speak... knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us together into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that, as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

Draw near to God...then speak.

Amen