

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, March 12, 2024
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“This Old Tent”

READING: II Corinthians 5:1-9 – Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

So I'm reading "The Resurrection of Jesus" by Dr. Michael R. Licona. It's a very scholarly theological study, and he weeds through all the many, many studies done by both believers, skeptics, and atheists. In the course of reading the book, I came to a section in which our text for today is discussed because the meaning of "resurrection" has to be established. Some scholars maintain that on Easter the Apostles were greeted by "the spirit of Jesus", ethereal, not physical. This of course would completely alter the Christian faith, and according to St. Paul in I Corinthians 15, negate the hope and power of Easter.

At the start of the discussion regarding our text, Dr. Licona writes, "Before drawing a final conclusion on Paul, we will need to consider his teaching in a passage that has created much controversy and which presents the possibility that he changed his view of the meaning of "resurrection" after writing I Corinthians." He goes on to say, "This passage has been one of the most difficult in the New Testament for scholars to decipher, and little agreement exists regarding its meaning." From there he lists a number of views on just what Paul is saying about the state of the Christian immediately after death and the thought of many that he indicates "an immediate 'resurrection'" with an ethereal "heavenly dwelling".

Now, I am not a Doctor of Theology, nor a learned scholar. I'm just a dumb old pastor, but what confuses and confounds the "wise" does not present a great mystery to me. In none of the viewpoints he presented in this section did I see one reference to John 14:2-3, where we hear Jesus promise, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." I believe Paul is making a direct application to what Jesus promised the Apostles at the Last Supper. Yes, Paul probably wrote I Corinthians before John's Gospel was written and dispersed, but Paul had met with various of the Disciples and leaders of the Church who would very likely have spoken of that night with Paul. Paul is not writing this passage in a vacuum.

The problem with the "scholars" is that so many of them don't believe any of the words they are parsing. They don't believe that the entire Bible is one complete love story, though written by many authors, conveys one coherent and abiding vision set down by our God. They get confused and wrapped up in the pieces without sitting back and looking at the whole. If you took a two-by-two-inch piece of the Mona Lisa and studied it without seeing how it fits in the whole painting, you could and would come up with erroneous conclusions, I guarantee it!

Paul was a tentmaker. He knows that tents are not permanent dwellings, they are not very secure, and eventually they cannot be repaired and have to be replaced with something new. He uses what he knows

about tents to describe what is true about our mortal bodies. They are not permanent dwellings (“...three score and ten, or eighty if we have the strength.”). They are not very secure because they are prone to injury, illness, accident, and aging. And, finally, just as Paul frequently had to tell people he couldn’t repair their old and rotted tents, the day comes when the doctor says to us, “I’m sorry, but there’s nothing more we can do.”

But Paul says twice, “We are confident!” Why? When this mortal body comes to its end, we have a place awaiting us in heaven. We won’t be ghosts flitting around old, abandoned houses. We won’t be disembodied spirits with no future. No, Jesus has already promised us he has a place already prepared for us in heaven. And, when the glorious day of his second coming arrives, we will be resurrected with “tents” that will never expire, for they will be like his glorious body, filled with eternal life.

So, pity the “wise and learned” who so often are foolish and confused because they do not see Jesus for who he is, nor the Word of God for the treasures it contains. They cannot see the forest for the trees. St. Paul says we can be confident that when this life leaves us, we can and should rejoice that our Lord has us covered. We’ll be just fine. He has our place prepared. And best of all, we get to be where he is – our Father’s house. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1) **LENTEN SERVICES** are being offered every Wednesday. Services start at 7:00 PM. Our overall theme is “The Forgiveness Challenge” and the pastors are interviewing various Biblical characters whose lives or stories teach us important truths about the forgiveness of God and the forgiveness we can give to one another. This week St. Peter visits us. Join us as well.