

Second Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon text: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1
Related text: Psalm 130
Genesis 3:8-15
Date preached: June 10, 2012

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.” This verse out of Second Corinthians 4, hits us all very close to home.

We live in a society that gives a great deal of attention to our outer nature. There are many things that are advertised as being bad for our health. For example, I love spaghetti. I could eat it all day, seven days a week throughout most of the year. Yet, such a high carb diet is not good for my outer nature which includes my weight, cholesterol, arteries, etc.

In our culture there is a great deal of emphasis on the flesh, our outer nature. Of course, there are a host of answers available to me and anyone else with unhealthy habits. The latest diets, exercises, and vitamins are celebrated as easy to do, to regain a healthy living.

As we age, we become even more acutely aware of the wasting away of our outer nature. If I had a buck for every person who told me, don't get old pastor, I'd likely be able to retire.

Arthritis becomes an unwelcome guest in our bodies. Canes and walkers serve as a visible announcement to the world that our legs which ran miles in play as children are wearing out. The symptoms and conditions related to old age are treated with a buffet like assortment of medicines.

Because of sin, death is at work in us. Through Adam and Eve, humanity was plunged into sin from which we are incapable of saving ourselves. The guilt associated with our sins, the stress that amounts in our lives as a result of sins consequences build up to eat away at our bodies.

The reading from Genesis 3:8-15 only speaks of the consequences of sin to the serpent. Introduced to humanity are a multitude of qualities that lead us from God. Meet such villains as envy, jealousy, vanity, selfishness, arrogance, greed, lust, and all other things that affiliate with a “Me first” consciousness.

Our hope is not in curing our outer natures. Our hope for healthier living, better relationships, and pain free lives will not come from self help books, medicine bottles or from humankind’s wisdom. Our hope is in the one who is able to deliver us out of the depths of our despair.

Our hope lies in the building of a house not made of hands. It is one built upon the very Word of God, creator of heaven and earth.

For with the Lord, there is plenteous redemption. As stated from Psalm 130, redemption is near even when we cry out from the caverns of our mortal distress. That redemption comes through the cross of Jesus Christ. There Jesus paid the price for our sins.

In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther taught this as it relates to the second article of the Apostles' Creed: "He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with blood or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally."

In other words, while the world looks for ways to ease the pains and work against the coming of death to our mortal bodies, our hope comes in the resurrection of our Lord.

Because Christ has been raised, we too have the promise of resurrection. To believe in the resurrection of the body is to believe that through Christ, our bodies will be raised up and fashioned anew.

So as we live in this earthly body, we know full well that such life is for only a brief period. It is in this sense that Paul can speak of the wasting of our outer nature as a momentary affliction, even if that “momentary affliction” is with us for years.

As you read on your own into Chapter five, or simply wait until next week as that will appear in our lectionary, we have a confidence of living by faith. Verse 8 reads, “Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.”

With the very life, with our outer nature, we are given a gift. Like all treasured gifts, it is given in love. It is given in the trust that the gift will be used well, appropriately, and as it is intended.

The same is true of our bodies. As a gift from God, wise stewardship will be a practice of caring well for our bodies, our souls, and all that we call our own.