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Pentecost 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Confidence and Hope in Jesus”

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35; Genesis 3:8-15

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

***We do not lose heart.*** That’s what Paul said today in the Epistle. ***We do not lose heart.***

Ever know someone like that? Someone who, no matter what’s happening around them, no matter what’s happening to them, they somehow remain confident, they don’t give up, they don’t give in to despair, they stay optimistic. I don’t know about you, but I marvel at people like that. People diagnosed with cancer and undergoing brutal chemotherapy who ***do not lose heart.*** People standing in the rubble of their house or town after a devastating tornado or flood who ***do not lose heart.*** I haven’t had any of those things happen to me, so I don’t know how I’d react . . .

But I do know how easy it is to lose heart. When you look around at the division and hatred in our country, or maybe even in your family, *it’s easy to lose heart.* When you see all the scams and crime in our world today, and the vileness, *it’s easy to lose heart.* We heard it in the readings today, Adam and Eve lost heart and ran away and hid from God. Maybe Jesus’ family lost heart, when they heard people saying of Jesus that ***He is out of His mind.*** And certainly, I would think, the families of those people possessed by demons lost heart, seeing what was happening to their loved one. Truth is, there are a lot of reasons today to lose heart.

And Paul comes along and seems to say: *there, there. Don’t lose heart. This is a slight and momentary affliction.* Which sounds like people today who say things like: *This too shall pass. What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.* Words that, honestly, while well-intentioned, don’t help much! Because, *easy for you to say!* Right? Easy to say when you’re not in it! When those words are coming from someone who isn’t experiencing the trials and troubles and tribulations.

*But that’s not Paul.* Because Paul was in it! He did suffer much affliction. His words aren’t coming from someone who’s life was easy and good. Quite the opposite. Paul’s words are like those coming from someone who did go through cancer, someone who did lose everything in a natural disaster. *Their* words carry weight. They know what they’re talking about. We listen to them.

And Paul knows. He knows the weight. He was shunned, he was beaten, he was imprisoned, he was cold and tired and hungry, he had a thorn in the flesh tormenting him . . . But Paul knew not just affliction from other people and things in this world, but maybe even more, the burden from his own failures and sins. Sometimes that weight of guilt and shame can be even greater and far more crushing than any other. The regrets, the *coulda, woulda, shouldas*, the *I wish I could do it over again*, the beating yourself up - that's a weight I know. I'm guessing you, too. And Paul did. He knew his sin. He boasted of it even! How he persecuted the Church, and more zealously than anyone else! *And then Jesus appeared to him . . .* think he felt that crushing weight of sin and regret and guilt and shame? Like we do?

But then that weight was lifted from Paul! He was no longer being crushed by it. **Jesus forgave him**, and even more, was going to use him to help others. What else could you call that but a resurrection! From being crushed to free! Having a new lease on life, a new life to live. So Paul knows whereof he speaks. For he's not only been *in* it, he's come *through* it. Because of Jesus.

That's what he said, and why he said: ***SO we do not lose heart***. That little word SO is important. It links this thought to what came before - to the reason ***we do not lose heart***. And what came before is this: ***knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence***. Which is to say: Jesus' resurrection is the reason for our hope. It is the reason the Christian faith is not mere optimism or self-help; *it is far more than that*. It is the sure and certain hope that because Jesus is risen from the dead, so will I be. The proof that all Jesus' words and promises are true. That no matter what the devil, the world, and my own sinfulness can throw at me - or maybe better to say, can throw ON me! - we have a future in Jesus. We have hope. We have victory.

As I said, there are a LOT of reasons to lose hope in our world today, and only ONE reason to not lose hope. But that one is enough.

And Paul described it, our hope, this way: ***For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison***. That's an interesting and kind of weird phrase, isn't it? A *weight of glory*? What is that? Well, think of scales - not the digital kind we have now, but the old fashioned kind with two sides. You put a weight on each side and the side that goes down is heavier. Paul is saying that the afflictions we have in this world and life, here and now, are on one side of that scale. And maybe for you there's a LOT of them, and they seem really heavy and really crushing and certainly drop down on the scales. And they do.

But then Jesus gets put on the other side of that scale. And then His side goes down and your side goes up. Know why? Not because He's God. But because all the afflictions, all the sin, all the guilt, all the trials, troubles, and tribulations, everything that makes us lose

heart, all that weight you feel - and not just yours, but of all people ever! - were put on Him, on His side of the scale. On the cross. That's what led the prophet Isaiah to say, *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . . he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities* (Isaiah 53:4-5). He was crushed under them, not you. *For you.*

And then He rose. The life that was crushed out of Him, returned. All the sin, all the guilt, all the affliction, all the weight, could not win. Jesus did. And that victory Jesus gives to you. He does it here. *I forgive you all your sins*, He says. And let me be clear: when you hear those words, it is like that person with cancer hearing the doctor say: *you are healed! You are cancer free!*

Now wait just a second pastor! That's not the same! Being cured of cancer and forgiveness . . . you can't compare those! And you're right. You're right . . . *The forgiveness is FAR greater!* For being cured of cancer gives you life here and now, but forgiveness gives you life that is eternal. So while we want the glory, the ease, the trouble-free life now, that is not God's way. He wants more for you than that. So these *slight momentary afflictions*, Paul says, *are* preparing us for and *preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.*

And so we read of Jesus that *for the joy that was set before him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God* (Hebrews 12:2). Now, no one would say that the cross was a slight momentary affliction! But Jesus endured it because of the joy that was set before Him. Because after the cross comes glory. After death comes life. For Him, and now, for us.

And so Paul directs us to *those things that are unseen*. Not that aren't real - things that are real, just unseen. In fact, we could even say that the things that are *unseen* are *more real* than the things that are seen! *For*, Paul goes on to say, *the things that are seen are transient*, - that is, temporary, passing away - *but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

Which is good news! For much of what we see and can see, as I said at the beginning of the sermon, makes us lose heart. When we see sin, evil, division, oppression, hardship, unfairness, greed, selfishness, mutilation. Oh, there are good things in this world, too, to be sure. But it's always a fight, isn't it? Between good and evil, right and wrong. Just as in Jesus' day, as Jesus was fighting for us, casting out demons and teaching what is good and true. And for that, some accused HIM of being what He was fighting against! That He was evil and demonic; that that's where He got His power from. And that He was crazy. He was *out of His mind.*

But maybe *we're* the ones who are out of our minds - out of our *right* mind - because of sin, so that we don't think rightly anymore. Thinking that God is evil and evil is good. That what we see is more real than what we cannot see. So Jesus shows us a better way,

the *right* way to think. To see with the eyes of faith what is unseen, and to know that as dark and sinful as this world may get, **we have hope**. Not that we can get ourselves out of this mess, but that Jesus can. And did. For when Adam and Eve brought the darkness of sin and death into the world, God promised the Saviour who would bring the light that scatters the darkness, the forgiveness that atones for sin, and the life that overcomes death. And when Jesus came into the world, that's what He did, casting out demons, forgiving sin, and rising from the dead. And for that, they said He was *out of His mind*.

Well, if that's true, **let us all be out of minds the same!** To confess the hope that is in us and not lose heart. To know that through His Word and Sacraments, Jesus is plundering satan's house, rescuing sinners, and raising us to life. A life that is new and eternal. And if things aren't going your way, **do not lose heart**. These are *slight momentary afflictions*. They really are. They may not feel slight but heavy, not momentary but ongoing, and not just afflictions but crushing burdens. **But Jesus will not let them crush you**. So do not rely on what you see and feel, but on the words and promises of Jesus, on His strength, His food, His resurrection, and His life.

And then you will be one of those people - you know the ones. The ones people marvel at. That don't give up, don't give in to despair, who remain not optimistic, but confident. Confident that what Jesus said is true, that His victory is yours, and that ***though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day***. Until Jesus comes again, and the outer and the inner are the same, the new life is complete, and the glory has come. That's you! In Christ. Full of life, full of hope, full of faith. Faith in the one who did not lose heart, who remained steadfast, and who won. And who will not let you down.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.