

**“Do Not Lose Heart”**  
2 Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1

In the latter part of the today’s passage, Paul makes references such as the **“outer nature wasting away”**... experiencing **“affliction”**... the **“earthly tent we live in (being) destroyed.”** These would likely remind us all of the trials and tribulations of ‘A-G-E’... those advancing years in which we feel our **‘outer nature wasting away’** in the face of **‘affliction,’** dealing with the ways that our **‘earthly tent’** is being **‘destroyed.’** As most of us know, sometimes from personal experience, ‘Getting old is a *REAL BIT---TER PILL TO SWALLOW!*’ *What?* What did you *think* I was going to say? 😊

But we also know that those ‘afflictions’ of the ‘earthly tent’ that cause one to ‘waste away’ are NOT limited to the ‘elderly.’ (You know, after my experience in the ER last December, I can now USE that term ‘elderly’). Most every day we think about, or hear about, friends, family, or perfect strangers that are afflicted with conditions of various types that are leading them to, or have caused, their ‘destruction.’ And such destruction is not strictly due to physical illness and disease. Mental illness... depression, anxiety, fear, doubt anger... take a tremendous, unseen toll on countless individuals each and every day. Just this past week two prominent celebrities in industries of food and fashion took their own lives. And one of those, Kate Spade, had a documented long-standing battle with mental illness. A battle that she ultimately lost...

No matter the ‘age or stage’ of life... no matter if the ‘battleground’ is in the mind or the body... I believe that there is a distinct **relationship** between our **physical** and **mental health** and our **spiritual condition**. That the most **firm foundation** on which we can stand to be ‘body builders’... strong in mind, body, and spirit... is our **faith** in Jesus Christ. When all we can see is our *weakness*, it is the *strength* of our Savior that will sustain us... as attested to in God’s Word. In Paul’s words, **“as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture... WE DO NOT LOSE HEART.”**

There are three aspects of Paul's words in these passages that spoke to ME of how we can NOT 'lose heart' in the midst of a sometimes 'heart-LESS' world. (and let me remind you that these are just MY interpretations... in this 'priesthood of ALL believers' that we share 'membership' in, some of you fellow 'priests' might find *other* 'encouragement' in this passage!)

In its opening words, Paul wrote that ***"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."*** (2 Cor. 4:14) Paul expresses not only a faith for himself and those of his local 'congregation' ("**us**") but for the 'catholic church' ("**you**"). The universal body of believers that extended to those brothers and sisters in Corinth. Paul speaks to a larger community of faith, '**do not lose heart**' because we will be **TOGETHER**. He says to them 'God WILL bring us '*with you*'... TOGETHER... into his very presence. Even if you CAN'T see me just right now...'

This past week, at a Thursday morning men's group, we got into a discussion of the importance of 'church.' The question was posed, 'So if someone believes in Christ, isn't that enough? Do you HAVE to go to church to be a Christian?' NOW, as an ordained minister, I DO have the company line to tow. 'Well, OF COURSE you have to go to church!' But to say that one's *salvation* hangs in the balance? Hmmm... like Forrest Gump said, 'Well, I don't know 'bout *thayaat*.' Now, that being said, the question remains: can you truly live the type of Christian life that God intends you to have and not be in fellowship with other Christians? I don't think so. As human beings, we are MADE to be in community. 'No man (or woman) is an island.' Left to our own devices, we will no doubt have the 'company' of voices in our heads. The problem is, just WHOSE voices are they? Too often, ISOLATION leads to DESOLATION...

You may have heard me speak before about a minister who went to visit an old member of the church who hadn't been in a long time. The man was getting on in years, and was questioning just why it was important for him to make the effort to go to church. It being up north, in the cold of winter (y'all have heard of that before, right? 'cold' and 'winter'?), there was a fire burning. So the pastor, without saying another word, grabbed a pair of fireplace tongs, took a glowing ember out of the fire and placed it on the hearth, away from the fire. And soon it cooled off, and died out. POINT MADE.

In the words of Helen Keller, *“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”* She may have not had the use of her physical eyes, but her ‘vision’ was 20/20. **Together** we can do so much. **Together**, we can encourage one another. **Together**, we can keep the fire going in others... so that they ‘Do not lose heart.’

There is, of course, only so much that we can do for another. Each one of us has a personal responsibility in our walk with the Lord. A ‘response-ability’ to care for our spiritual health just as well as our physical and mental health. (Because they are ALL related!) In Paul’s words, *“**Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.**”* (2 Corinthians 4:16) To not lose heart, we must continue to be **RENEWED**.

There’s a very popular physical training regimen used around the world known as ‘CrossFit.’ One that a lot of people use to keep their ‘outer nature’ from ‘wasting away.’ We need to employ our own spiritual version of ‘CrossFit’ in order to **renew** our inner natures day-by-day. Spiritual disciplines like prayer, meditation, devotionals, Bible studies, discussion groups. Enrichment classes, community involvement, service opportunities both in the church and outside of it. ANY spiritual ‘exercise’ that helps you to grow in your Christian ‘walk’.

To ‘walk with Jesus’ is just like ‘walking’ with a friend or ‘walking’ the dog: it takes EFFORT. It takes TIME. It takes COMMITMENT. But as we do, our ‘inner nature’ will be ‘renewed’ day-by-day. And you can even do the two of them... physical and spiritual ‘walking’... at the same time. Heck, I do some of my best work in prayer when it’s just me and God, and the pavement, running in the heat. (When I *especially* need to pray!) But walking... or running... with the Lord is the ULTIMATE ‘cardio’... walking with Jesus, the only One who is truly ‘cross-fit’...

And finally, undergirding both our efforts to work TOGETHER and be RENEWED in our daily lives, we need that reassuring confidence that God is there through it all. What do we have that gives us what singer Chris Tomlin so eloquently speaks of in his song “I Will Rise”: *“A peace I’ve come to know, though my heart and flesh may fail... there’s an anchor for my soul, (so) I can say, ‘It is well.’”* Perhaps our soul’s ‘anchor’ might be found in the closing words of today’s passage:

***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.” (2 Corinthians 5:1)***

Paul is saying, basically, that ‘we KNOW’... ‘we HAVE’... eternal HOPE! This verse reminds us that God has our back... and our front, our sides, our top and bottom. This verse assures us that when all else fails, God NEVER fails. That our only true refuge from life’s storms is not man-made, but from God. This verse reminds us that unlike anything else on this earth, God offers us **HOPE**.

As most of you know, we have a house in BR. A family home we inherited from my parents. To borrow from some lyrics by Audio Adrenaline, it is ‘a big big house with lots and lots of room.’ An old, beautiful home that also bears witness to that saying that ‘*All that glitters is not gold.*’ Because, as is the case with any property, it requires **upkeep**. In this case, ‘Lots and lots’ of it! Along with a ‘lot and lot’ of ‘**gold.**’ And just as importantly, that other valuable asset known as **TIME**. And that is one resource that seems to be spent mostly on the WEST side of the Atchafalaya. But, no matter how much work it needs, it still affords us a place in which to gather together with that most valuable resource we have on this earth... **FAMILY**.

A couple weeks back we made time to spend a couple of days there. In large part because we needed to do some work outside... you know, in these great ‘spring’ days we’ve been having lately! Aside from much-needed clipping of azalea bushes along the driveway, we also needed to plant two **hydrangeas** that were graciously given to Barrie for Mother’s Day in honor of her Mom.

Now, there were two ornamental pots with nothing really in them that would have been quite easy to use. But Barrie reminded me of the value of the soil in the flower bed, which would enhance their chances to survive, and thrive.

Sooo, I began digging two holes in that dry, rocky soil. And about an hour later... during which God and I had much ‘quality conversation’... those beautiful plants had found a home in the front of ours...

As I leaned on my shovel, admiring those two relatively small plants in front of that big house, I found myself questioning the value of my efforts. How much DIFFERENCE did I make?

There was STILL so much to be done for, in the words of a popular show on HGTV, 'This old house.'

But then it dawned on me that it wasn't so much WHAT we did as to what it REPRESENTED. It wasn't simply what we did for the 'outer nature' of the house... but rather, what we did for the 'inner nature' of its owners. By our physical labors, we had been **renewed** in our spirits. Our efforts demonstrated that it was not an empty house, but that inside there was LIFE. Life of a **family** in which **hope** is lived out **together**.

The truth is that it's not really about simply what a dwelling looks like from the *outside*... but what's on the *inside*. That what really counts in life is not 'real estate'... but **relationships**. Not taking the easy way out... but putting in the **time** that will last, and flourish. Knowing that whatever happens to these 'tents' we call 'home,' our true home is yet to come. So, like Paul said: **Do not lose heart...**

CHARGE: Residents at Golden Age. Ones who can certainly relate to "***outer natures wasting away... affliction... earthly tents (being) destroyed.***" **AND YET...** singing, smiling, praying, shouting 'AMEN!' **WHY?** Because they were there all **TOGETHER...** their ***inner natures were being RENEWED...*** and they had **HOPE** for their future 'homes'. Not another NURSING HOME. But a house "***not made with hands, (but) eternal in the heavens.***" May we keep an 'eternal' perspective, that our 'momentary afflictions' are preparing us for an everlasting glory. And in the meantime, let us help others to 'not lose heart'...