



Daily Faith Practices

Sunday, June 5-11 (B) – 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Focus: *Don't Lose Heart!*

word of life

“So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.” 2 Corinthians 4:16 (NRSV)

Read 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

The readings for the next five Sundays are all taken from 2 Corinthians. It is helpful to give an overview of the book. Many scholars believe that the epistle as we know it now was originally a series of letters to the fledgling church in Corinth. The members of this struggling faith community were primarily composed of the uneducated and the poor. (See 1 Corinthians 1:26-28.)

In his first letter, Paul addresses specific problems which were dividing the congregation. In 2 Corinthians, he defends his apostleship against those who challenge it. His purpose is to serve Christ and proclaim the message of the cross, not to have personal gain or glory. Paul exhorts the believers to not lose hope, despite suffering that would otherwise lead to despair.

1. *Imagine your congregation receiving a letter like this. What would the emphasis be for your setting?*
2. *How do we communicate concern for other congregations, especially those that are struggling?*

The theme of the reading for today is summarized in six little words: “So we do not lose heart.” (vs. 16) Paul exhorts the church in Corinth to continue to have faith, even where there is affliction. He uses a series of contrasting themes – outer self/inner self, affliction/glory, things seen/things unseen, temporary/eternal – as evidence to not lose heart.

Paul has personally known affliction and suffering. He has experienced and endured imprisonment, beatings, ostracism, ridicule, and abuse; yet he does not despair. Instead, he sees his suffering as being joined to the suffering and death of Jesus; and his confidence is grounded in the hope of being joined to the resurrection of Jesus. **This** contrast – from death to resurrected life – is the most important one and gives meaning and hope in all other afflictions.

3. *How do you deal with suffering and affliction?*
4. *What difference does it make to see our suffering being joined to the suffering of Jesus?*

There is a flow of thought in today’s reading. First, our faith, even in the midst of our affliction, becomes our witness. Paul quotes a paraphrased version of Psalm 116:10 (NRSV): “I kept my faith, even when I said, ‘I am greatly afflicted.’” Our witness is not only to the affliction but also to the resurrection – Christ’s and ours, for “...we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us also with you into his presence.” (2 Corinthians 4:14 NRSV) The assurance of the promised resurrection brings us to “an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure,” (2 Corinthians 4:17 NRSV) and inspires even greater faith. (vs. 18) All this we know to be true because of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. **SO WE DO NOT LOSE HEART!**

5. *What do the words “do not lose heart” mean to you?*
6. *How might our affliction become a witness to others?*

word among us

The theme from today's reading ("So we do not lose heart") has been experienced and lived by the faith community throughout the centuries. The musical genre of the African American spiritual expresses it completely. The spirituals give voice to the harsh realities experienced. The songs were often prayers: "In my troubles, Lord, walk with me. When my life becomes a burden, Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me." (*I Want Jesus to Walk with Me*)

1. *What (if any) spirituals do you know?*
2. *What songs and hymns bring you comfort in times of affliction?*

Through the lyrics of the spirituals, the suffering experienced is joined to the suffering of Jesus: "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows but Jesus." (*Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen*) The words speak of a hope when all seems hopeless, as well as a comfort in times of affliction: "There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul." (*There is a Balm in Gilead*)

The hope and promise is to be one day with God in heaven: "Soon-a-will be done with the trouble of the world. No more weepin' and wailin,' going home to live with God." (*Trouble of the World*)

In the midst of suffering and bondage, sorrow and pain, toil and loss, the voices of confident faith sing through the tears. The lyrics and those who sang them bear witness to a confident faith and hope of a faith community firmly grounded in the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

3. *Name a song which helped you get through a difficult time.*
4. *Why do you think these songs and hymns help in these times?*

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

"If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus and say, 'He died for all.'"
(*There is a Balm in Gilead*)

Uneducated slaves, despite their afflictions, express a profound faith in God and a hope for the glory yet to come. Common Corinthians, poor and lowly in the eyes of the world, bear witness to the cross and resurrection. And you and I...? We are called to do the same. We are claimed by God in our baptism and joined to Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. In our times of struggle, we can tell the love of Jesus. In our times of affliction, we can hold fast and be a witness to the hope of the glory yet to come. And in all circumstances of life, "we do not lose heart."

5. *When have you been challenged in your life to keep the faith and not lose heart?*
6. *Name someone in your life who has held fast and been a witness to the faith.*

Prayer

Ever-present God, in our times of struggle and affliction, give us your grace so we may never lose heart.
Amen

last word

Listen to or read
an African-American spiritual this week.

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