***“My Mother and My Brothers”*** by S. Finlan, at The First Church, June 6, 2021

**2 Corinthians 4:14–5:1**

14We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. 15Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

16So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. 17For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, 18because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

5:1For 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.

**Mark 3:31–35**

31Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” 33And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” 34And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 35Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

In this period after Pentecost, we have been reading about the Spirit. And we still have the flavor of Easter with us, with thoughts of the Resurrection, which is the proof of life after death. One of our readings today also speaks of our future resurrection.

In the letter from the Apostle Paul, we read “the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus” (2 Cor 4:14). This is a common image in Paul’s writing: Jesus as our predecessor or way-shower. Because of *Jesus’* Resurrection, *we* will be resurrected. And since God pours out his grace on us, we do not lose heart, even in troubling times. In fact, “Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day” (4:16). Despite your body aging, your *inner* nature is being nurtured, strengthened, renewed every day, readying you for this life and the afterlife.

As you go through life you may notice that the things that can affect you the most are those you can’t see. Likewise, you cannot see your own transformation, but you can sense it; you can see some by-products, as when you notice that you have a certain calmness that you didn’t have before, or more kindness than you had before.

Paul is confident that the afterlife will be “an eternal weight of glory beyond measure” (4:17). He refers to the earthly body as a tent when he says, “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” (5:1). The building or house in the heavens is the new, spiritual body. It will endure forever, and that makes up for any suffering one must endure down here. So the main theme of this passage is *hope*. There are daily renewal, promised resurrection, future glory, and an eternal body in the heavens. What riches for hope to build on! We participate in the creation of this new body by our actions today, and our growth from glory to glory. And it’s not wishful thinking. It is hope buoyed by real spiritual growth that you are experiencing by faith. Faith-based hope is a living truth.

Let’s move to the gospel passage. The emphasis there is really on *truth*. Jesus is teaching truth, but his family has become a bit out of touch with what he is teaching. They show up while he’s preaching and try to horn in on the spotlight, sending up word to him that they have arrived, and thinking he will stop preaching and acknowledge them. But Jesus is not about to stop preaching for the sake of his family’s ego gratification. He makes it crystal clear what really matters. “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asks, probably sending a chill down his mother’s and brothers’ spines. “Here are my mother and my brothers!” He says. “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (3:34–35). In effect, he’s saying to his family: “my dear family: just because you’re related to me does not raise you above other people. What matters in God’s family is whether you are doing the will of God. Those here who are listening to me and seeking God’s will are my true, that is, my *spiritual* family.” Maybe he was able at some point to sit down and explain this to his family. We don’t know.

You might ask how Jesus can be so sharp with his own family? It is because they were not on board with the spiritual message. In fact, a few verses before this passage, his family “went out to restrain him, for people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind’” (Mark 3:21). They were concerned with *their* reputation. In our story, they have changed their minds slightly, in that they now appreciate his fame, and want to get some attention and adulation of their own. This is really manipulative. If they had become spiritual believers, Jesus probably would have done more to include them, but we learn later that they only really came to believe in him after his death and resurrection. The Apostle Paul says that Jesus makes a post-Resurrection appearance specifically to James (1 Cor 15:7). Either before this time or *at* this time, James became a believer. The truth in all this is that what really matters is believing and becoming part of the spiritual family.

Your spiritual family is really very large, much larger than your genetic family. In the spiritual family truth and hope coincide, the truth of your spiritual family bolsters your hope and anticipation of great things to come. Faith and truth support you in the present, and give you hope for the future.

Claims of genetic linkage to the founder can be very harmful to religious movements, when legitimacy is linked to descent. There was very little of this in Christianity, although Jesus’ brother James became head of the Jerusalem church. But we have no record of a genetic link having any influence in the next generation.

The lesson of this story is that you need to have the right motivation when you approach Jesus. Coming to Jesus just in order to get public approval is the wrong reason, and will earn you a rebuke. His family was hoping for public acclaim, and he did not honor it. Instead, Jesus promotes the one supreme motive: the desire to do the will of God. This is meant to be the guiding motivation for each person. In the Lord’s Prayer we pray for God’s will to be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Our responsibility is to see that God’s will is done in our individual lives, and throughout our lives.

Sometimes people talk about the will of God in a passive way, or in connection with disasters, saying that it was God’s will that a hurricane came, or that some other disaster happened. This is not what Jesus is talking about. He is referring to God’s will for love and truth and family feeling between people. He is talking not about what God *allows* to happen (like hurricanes), but what he *wants* to happen (like love and recognition of truth).

Now, of course, there is evil that happens. There are many things that happen in this world that are not God’s will, such as government violence against human rights advocates or against religious groups, such as we see in Myanmar, China, Belarus, and Russia, to panic-driven acts of public violence, such as the Tulsa Race Massacre, which happened one hundred years ago this week. These events happened due to choices that *people* made.

Again I say that seeking to do the will of God is the supreme motive. This has to include moral and ethical principles. And we need to not blame human evildoing on God. Violence and suppression of the truth are never God’s will. We need hope and respect and love of truth and goodness to overcome all tendencies toward fear, blame, and bias. Truth and goodness *will* eventually overcome, and “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea,” as the prophet Habakkuk said (2:14).

So trust that your inner nature is being renewed day by day; trust that you are buildinga house not made with hands, with a spiritual foundation, eternal in the heavens; and seek the generous, healthy, and fulfilling will of God to guide the course of your life. See that the arc of your life resonates with the will of God. Then you will know what is meant by the “weight of glory” that awaits with you. We are all growing from glory into glory.