

Spreading Grace

By Linda Rex

June 9, 2024, Proper 5 | After Pentecost—In last week's blog, I wrote about how God's treasure, his glorious presence, is hidden in these jars of clay or shells, as human beings, and how, by the Spirit, Jesus is made manifest to those around us. We are faced, as those who follow Christ, with the challenge of responding to Jesus' command to lay down our lives, to pick up our cross, and to follow him.

In this Sunday's passage, 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1, the apostle Paul tells the members at Corinth that his message of the good news of Jesus Christ was birthed in the "spirit of faith" which compelled him. His ministry of sharing the gospel was other-centered, spreading the grace of God through Jesus Christ to more and more people, so that thanksgiving would abound to God's own glory. Paul looked forward with great anticipation to the day when he and those he was sharing the message with would rise with Christ and be presented to God.

What is interesting to me about this passage is how the apostle Paul goes on to talk about the challenges he experienced as he shared the good news of Jesus Christ with others. He calls these "light affliction", even though he experienced beatings, shipwreck, persecution, and rejection. In comparison with Paul's experiences in his mission ministry, I find that my struggles are nothing in comparison. For example, this morning, as I started to do the Our Life in the Trinity tasks, the power went off in my home and was off until this evening. This inconvenience made doing my tasks very difficult, but it is nothing in comparison with the true difficulties the apostle Paul faced in his ministry.

Paul reminded the members at Corinth that even though we grow older and more fragile in our external being, our internal being is being renewed day by day. The false self, which died with Christ, is only temporal and will not last. One day it will be gone forever. The new self, which rose with Christ, is eternal, ever becoming more solidified in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, who lives in us. When we die, that which is temporal and has died with Christ will be replaced with our true self—that which is hidden with Christ in God. Our true self will live eternally in the new heaven and new earth, when God comes to dwell with man.

It is this hope planted firmly in our minds and hearts that inspires us to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. As the Holy Spirit enables us to see this picture of our life in Christ, both now and forever, we are moved to talk about it. What has so profoundly changed our lives and given us a new vision of God and of the future compels us to spread the grace of God to more and more people. The result is a groundswell of thanksgiving and praise, all for the glory of God.

If we are honest with ourselves, we can see that too often our focus is not on the eternal realities, but on the temporal, passing pleasures or struggles of this life. Paul reminds us to focus on what will last forever, not on what will disappear one day. This is a real challenge for us, for what can be seen, tasted, felt, heard, or done is what occupies our attention more than what may be going on inside of us or in the hearts of others. Unless we make the effort to attend to the spiritual realities, we may live in ways that are indifferent or inobservant to what is most important. We may miss out on the joy of participating in what God is doing in this world as he brings many people to himself to participate in the grace of God through his Son Jesus Christ by the Spirit.

When we keep our eyes and hearts on the passing, temporal concerns of this life, it is easy to lose heart. Paul encourages us to remember the spiritual realities, our grounding in Christ, in his life, death, resurrection and ascension, and all that means for us. This grace moves us to thanksgiving and praise, and our faith in Christ compels us to share the good news with others. As we gather

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to share this journey in Christ, we find ourselves participating in the divine life and love, experiencing a foretaste of the joy we will experience one day when Jesus returns in glory.

Dear Trinity, thank you for sharing your life and love with us through Jesus in your Spirit. Grant us the grace to pay attention to what really matters, and to keep our eyes on you. May your grace spread out into all the world and may you be fully glorified, now and forever, as all give thanks to you, through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

“But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed, therefore I spoke,’ we also believe, therefore we also speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”
2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1 NASB