



Lamb of God Lutheran Church – Columbus, Ohio

May 28, 2017 (7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter)

*Preacher: Pastor Timothy Wagner*

*Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 4:13-18*

*Sermon Theme: Fix Your Eyes on What is Unseen*

***<sup>13</sup> It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, <sup>14</sup> because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. <sup>15</sup> All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.***

***<sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.***



This Memorial Day weekend, we honor our fallen heroes – those who have given their lives to win and defend the liberties we love and cherish so deeply. Veterans Day is about the soldiers who made it home from battle. Memorial Day is about those who didn't make it.

Why did they do it? Why did they enlist, knowing that swords and guns and bombs could be aimed at them? Why did they go off to war, knowing that they might not come home? Maybe you know someone who laid down their life on a battlefield. And if you had asked them why they were willing to go, they may have said something like this: "I'm willing to give up my life so that others can have a better life...I'm fighting for a better America, a safer America, a brighter America for all who call this country home."

They fight for families and children back home. They fight for future generations of Americans who haven't even been born yet. Because they fix their eyes on what they don't see, they are willing to see horrible things and endure horrible things, even death, on the battlefield.

St. Paul had seen some pretty horrible things in his life. As a Christian, he had endured stonings, beatings, floggings. He had been tortured and abused, imprisoned and mistreated. How many times did he wake up and wonder, *Why am I doing this?* What kept him from giving up? In our second lesson for today, Paul helps us to understand what it was. And as he does, he gives us the encouragement we need to keep going, when trials and troubles come our way, when following Jesus seems to bring more problems than it solves.

And it's all about perspective. When you face an overwhelming task, one of the ways to get through it is to think about the end, with the confidence that the outcome will be worth whatever you have to do to get there.

That's the approach Paul takes, as he encourages us. The problem is that we've never experienced the end. We haven't actually seen the outcome. And there is no one else who has. When you take on a big task, you can often see progress in the steps along the way. With every step you take, you can see the finish line getting closer. With every piece you add, your project looks more complete.

But, when it comes to our lives, it doesn't work that way. We can see the end only by faith. And what it looks like on the other side of that finish line is not something that the experiences of life help us to perceive any more clearly. In fact, the experiences of life so often consume our attention and make it hard to think about what's coming later.

Paul doesn't sugar coat the reality of the troubles we face in life. He never promises that the life of a Christian is a life of pain-free ease. In fact, he says just the opposite. He says, "***outwardly we are wasting away***" (v. 16). Outwardly, it can seem like everything is falling apart. Sorrow and suffering and weakness are the reality of life in a broken world. And it can seem like following Christ only adds to our troubles.

The problems we experience in this life can really weigh on us. The word Paul uses for “troubles” in verse 17 pictures a weight pressing down on you, an unrelenting pressure that won’t let up. Do you ever feel like life is like that? You get over one hurdle only to face another one. You can’t seem to get out from under the load of debt or guilt that it seems like you’ve been dealing with forever. It seems like there always something slowing you down and weighing you down – physically, financially, mentally, emotionally, spiritually.

And what do you do? Do you decide to just toughen up and tough it out? Do you look for someone to blame for your problems? Do you complain to God and grow impatient with his response time? Do you start to wonder whether it’s all worth it and what you are fighting for?

Then, here’s the perspective Paul wants to give you today. He calls our troubles “**light and momentary**” (v. 17). Doesn’t that sound like someone who just doesn’t understand? If Paul really knew some of your troubles, he wouldn’t say they are light and easy to bear! If he really knew how long you’ve been struggling, he wouldn’t say your problems are momentary!

But Paul is trying to show us that, when the pressure of our problems is threatening to crush us, and we are ready to give in or give up, when we feel like the weight of the world is on our shoulders and it’s just not fair, we have our eyes in the wrong place.

He says, “**Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all**” (v. 17). It’s not that our troubles are small or insignificant. It’s that, if you were to put all of the troubles of our 70 or 80 or 90 years in this world on a balance opposite the eternal joys of life with Jesus in heaven, there would be no comparison. The life to come is so much better, so much greater, that the greatest joys and the biggest struggles in this life will seem silly by comparison.

Have you ever seen something like that in your life? There’s something you are going through that just overwhelms you when you are going through it. You worry and stress about how you are going to survive. And then you look back years later, and you almost have to laugh at how small the problem actually was and how foolish you were to let it affect you so much.

When you and I get to heaven, we will experience so much joy that the pressures and problems of this life will be faint shadows by comparison, if we even remember them at all! And even if we have to deal with a problem for our entire life on this earth, that is but a moment, when you think about eternity and time that never ends!

Paul’s encouragement for us is to fix our eyes on the coming glory of heaven. But the problem is that we can’t see heaven. Paul knows that. He couldn’t see it either, not with his physical eyes. He says, “**We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal**” (v. 18).

That’s what faith is. Paul says, “**It is written: ‘I believed; therefore I have spoken.’ Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak**” (v. 13). He doesn’t say, “I speak because I’ve seen it with my own eyes” or, “Since we have absolute proof, we speak.” No, our confidence and our confession come from faith. The Bible says, “**Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see**” (Hebrews 11:1). God makes some pretty bold promises to us in his Word. And then he puts faith in our hearts to trust those promises.

The greatest promise God makes to us is that we will be raised from the dead on the last day and appear before God clothed in the perfect life that Jesus lived for us. None of us has been there yet. None of us has risen from the dead. But Paul says, “**We know that that one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself**” (v. 14).

He doesn’t say, “We think this will happen.” He doesn’t say, “We hope this comes true.” He says, “**We know...**” We fix our eyes on what is unseen. But notice that faith is not completely blind. It is based on a past reality. It is founded on the fact that Jesus has been raised from the dead. And Paul doesn’t just call him Jesus, but “**the Lord Jesus.**” He uses the term “Lord” to connect Jesus with all of the Old Testament prophecies of the

God of free and faithful grace, who would come to rescue his people from their sins and save them from death. Jesus was that Lord. His life met every one of the demands that God made of us, so that God announced, "***With him I am well pleased***" (Matthew 17:5). But he took the blame for our sins and was condemned to die in our place as a sacrifice of atonement.

And, if that's where the story ended, our faith would still be a completely blind faith. We wouldn't know whether our doubts and fears and worries were forgiven. We wouldn't know whether our tendency to let our troubles overshadow God's promises was taken away. We wouldn't have any real hope in life or death. But the story didn't end at the cross of Christ. God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead to show that the penalty for our sins had been paid in full and death no longer could lay claim to us.

Because Jesus was raised from the dead, his body is unseen in his tomb. And because there is nothing to see in Jesus' tomb, one day your grave will be left with nothing to see. So fix your eyes on what is unseen. Even in the face of death, you know with Paul that it's not the end. You know that you will be raised with Jesus and arrayed in his righteousness to stand faultless before his throne.

Isn't that what keeps you going from day to day? Isn't that why you keep fighting? You have something greater than political freedom to fight for. You have something greater than an earthly life to live for. Unlike those soldiers who gave their lives on the battlefield, you don't have to pay with your life. Jesus has already taken his place on the battlefield for you. With his sights set on your salvation, he aimed his arrows at the evil one and struck a deadly blow. He gave his own life as the ultimate sacrifice to win your freedom. When he did, he won for you a prize that, for now, is unseen but one day you will see with your own eyes. Trusting in his victory, through all of the troubles of life, fix your eyes on what is unseen, life after death and eternal glory with the God who gave his life for you. Amen.

## Lessons for May 28

### Acts 1:1-14

<sup>1</sup> In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>6</sup> Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

<sup>7</sup> He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

<sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

<sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

<sup>12</sup> Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. <sup>13</sup> When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup> They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

### 2 Corinthians 4:13-18

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### John 17:1-11a

<sup>1</sup> After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. <sup>2</sup> For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. <sup>3</sup> Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup> I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup> And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

<sup>6</sup> “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. <sup>8</sup> For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I

came from you, and they believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup> I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. <sup>10</sup> All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. <sup>11</sup> I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you.”