

“Resurrection and Renewal”

2nd Corinthians 4

4.15.12 (Sunday after Easter)

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, ² but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. ⁷ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; ⁸ we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹ For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death works in us, but life in you. ¹³ But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe, therefore we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ 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.

The Easter sermon (last Sunday) was based on the richest statement in the whole Bible of the Christian doctrine of resurrection. Today's sermon (this Sunday *AFTER* Easter) is maybe the second richest passage on this central Christian teaching. It goes on into the next chapter as well. We want to look at it *TODAY because...* we really can't afford to celebrate Easter and then move on! If this *IS* what makes Christianity *unique* among all religions and all other approaches to life then it's really *important for us* to focus on it...linger on it.

AND...since we, as a congregation, enjoyed a kind of build-up to Easter...we reflected on the death of Jesus Christ in 50 daily readings and celebrated Good Friday in a new way...and Easter was a real thrill...I am sensing that some of you feel...a little...let down ... after Easter. We waited for it...we celebrated the death of death, "Death, where is your sting?!"...It was *liberating* but...

it's already over...and *since then*, we've watched the news... we have bills ... we have deadlines at work and in school...signs of things falling apart... Why can't every day be Easter?

So, here's another jolt! Here's the Apostle Paul again thinking about this historical moment – a dead Man who said He would rise, that death could not hold Him and then He did RISE, was seen and those witnesses told the News everywhere and the world has been radically different...and Paul is again thinking of the event at the start of this movement and asking, "What difference does it make on the Sunday after Easter and on every day now and forever?"

This passage is a part of a defense. Paul is being attacked and having to answer some opponents inside and outside the Church. In the midst of that specific discussion, Paul presents a kind of view or *approach* to the spiritual life. As if to say, "This is how spirituality works...(as in v. 17) what it *produces*."

So let's look at it under three headings. How does the spiritual life work (according to the Gospel)? It works by:

#1 – Regeneration (a new Genesis)

#2 – Representation (the Cruciform life)

#3 – Renewal (encouragement in light of our weakness and God's strength)

Regeneration, Representation, Renewal

Paul has been getting grief, especially from traditional religious people... especially from his own people, from Conservative Jewish people.

They don't mind *Paul* teaching the Old Testament to Gentiles ("What could it hurt?!") but they want to make sure Paul stresses the right stuff. He should be emphasizing the *Law of Moses* so the Gentiles can start to shape up!...And ok we're fine with you mixing in some of the teachings of this Jesus of Nazareth...as long as you stress MOSES!"

But Paul is saying, "Moses came to condemn us! He came with the Law of God so we could see how far SHORT we all come – the 613 OT commands *scream* to us that we don't love God and don't love people *like we ought to!* And it's really important to know that! Moses did us all a great service – totally convinced us that we're not good, that we need a cure...need salvation!... So Moses is super!"

But Moses and His Laws aren't the core and most important part of the OT – *that would be the promises of God!* The OT is promising a Savior who would save us law-breakers! And if Moses was great and glorious (and he was!) how much more glorious is the One who is promised, who accomplishes the Law and saves us from the condemnation and guilt that Moses diagnosed.

Picture an absolutely pitch black stage – you literally can't see the hand in front of your face...and Moses strikes a match and lights a candle (now we can see how messed up we are! Yay!) but then behind that candle another light appears... the sun rises...*and when it does* the light of that candle is enveloped. So, Jesus Christ out-glories Moses like the sun out-shines a candle.

And that's why Paul insists to the consternation of his Jewish friends, "I'll talk about Moses...but I can't put him at the center! That place belongs to Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4.2) – who saves us from our guilt incurred by our breaking the Law. Moses diagnosed us – Jesus Christ heals us!"

And when you get this – when you see *that your own failings are way bigger than you thought* – and when you see that Jesus Christ came into the world to obey Moses for you (fulfill the demands) and to die under your penalty as a lawbreaker – when you get it, if you get it, it's like a new creation. It's like the God who spoke light into existence ("Let there be light!") it's like He shines the light in your soul:

"For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

In the next chapter, Paul will say, "If anyone is IN Christ he is a new creation" i.e. God has begun a re-creation in that person. It's not that the person suddenly knows all things but that *he has begun to see the main thing*, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." This regenerated person, part of a new order that God will bring about – sees that God is revealed in the human face of Jesus Christ. The most complete *unveiling* of God's glory and mercy is this Person, Jesus Christ the, Image of God, the God-Man. A creative act takes place and God speaks light into a soul and that soul sees and believes.

Now, what this means is – if you ARE a believer in Jesus Christ, it's because God has turned a light on in your heart. Charles Wesley wrote, "Thine eye diffused a quickening ray" i.e. God sent light into my soul and I came to life, was quickened, was regenerated and I believed. That's how the spiritual life begins and how it works.

And this new-genesis, God speaking light in to the soul stays focused on Jesus Christ, starts with Him and moves in His direction.

He represents me *i.e. He stood in my place*. He obeyed God's Laws as if I were doing it. He obeyed and I get the credit. In this new creation, Jesus Christ, the image of God, is the New Adam who ACTS on my behalf.

And as He stood in place, He also puts me in His place. I get His status – the Great Exchange (He the criminal and I the son). God sees me, represented by Jesus Christ, as if I were perfectly

obedient. He is the Firstborn of the dead, progenitor of a new humanity, the start of a new creation. And all that is His is mine... my Representative.

AND...by the mysterious working of His power, God is remaking me like My Representative. The Last chapter ended with these words, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory..."

I am being transformed. It's my destiny. I am even now, becoming what I am declared and destined to be – declared a delightful son and being transformed to look and act and think and speak like the son I have been declared to be... I am becoming like the One who represented me...*AND*

He is making me fit to also represent Him. That's why Paul would say, *"For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."* (v.11)

God is putting us into positions where He wants to be represented. We are called the Body of Christ as if *WE* are an extension of Him in the world. He is moving us in the direction of the "cruciform" life, the way of life patterned on Jesus Christ's own mode of existence.

Paul will not die for the sins of the world and neither will we (obviously!) but Paul will say some of the most outlandish things about this "cruciform" direction we're headed. God will replicate the dying and rising of Jesus *IN* those who believe.

Rom. 8.36, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

Colossians 1.24 "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

And here, 4.10-11 "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

He represents me so that I might also represent Him. God has placed us in the world, that the doing and dying of Jesus Christ would continue to echo and be refracted through us like a billion prisms...like mirrors. He has placed us where He wills so that the Good News of Jesus Christ would not only be announced but also actually embodied. God has purposed that like Jesus Christ (whom we represent in the world) *that our lives would be lived* for the spiritual benefit of others.

We live, dying to ourselves and as we do, the resurrection life of Jesus is demonstrated.

When Paul thought of this role we're given in the world, he asked in ch. 1, "who is adequate for this calling?" (2.16) – to represent Jesus Christ to the world in such a conclusive determinative way... And Paul answered, "but our adequacy is from God" (3.5)

And I have to ask myself... "Really? Is this what I signed up for when I started the Christian life? That I would be carrying about the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus might also be manifested in my body?..."

Well, like it or not, that is the Christian life and God WILL move us in that direction. And the Good News is that all along the way, He will continue to renew us. I don't know if you noticed but in this whole long passage there's not a single imperative. There's nothing for us to do, no commands.

Paul doesn't even say, "Don't lose heart" He says, "Therefore, we do not lose heart" (twice! vv. 1 and 16) And that's all to emphasize that God will do this! God will use our weakness to emphasize His strength and glory. *"We have this treasure in clay pots to show that the surpassing greatness of the power is from God and not from ourselves."*

When our weakness is exposed and really becomes evident...the stuff we want to hide and keep secret, God says, "You don't have to be afraid of that stuff...your 'clay-ness'... the weakness and the stuff that's discouraging...I put that there to keep you resting and depending on Me."

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. "

"It's so un-natural for you...you crave control and to be strong and independent...but that is not the way to become what I have destined you to be! Be weak and I will renew you within."

At the start of this letter Paul recounts one leg of his own journey where he was so depressed that he lost it "For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of the troubles which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life" (2 Corinthians 1.8)

And at the end of the letter Paul says, "And Christ has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

Have you heard people say, "God will never give you more than you can bear."? Paul is saying, "God always gives us more than we can bear because that's the only way we will stop making it about us! And the only way we will really know His power, His grace, His renewal, His sufficiency."

That's the only way we'll know that eternal and very heavy significance for which we are destined. When we are afflicted – then He will keep us from being crushed. When we are perplexed, then He will step in and save us from final despair. When we are persecuted then He will manifest His presence so that we know we are not alone. When we are struck down THEN we will know the feel of His protection and lift and His resurrection and renewal.

There's nothing to do in this chapter...just receive it. But if anything is even implied it may be in this last verse..."we look at the things not seen...which are eternal... We believe."

In the Wesleyan Tradition there's a prayer. I'm going to ask that we bow our heads now *and I'm going to read it one line at a time. If you feel lead, repeat the lines to the Lord silently* (Let's bow and pray):

*I am no longer my own, but Thine.
Put me where You will, rank me with whom You will,
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by Thee or laid aside for Thee,
Exalted for Thee or brought low for Thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to Thy pleasure and disposal.*

And now, O glorious and gracious God, I am Thine and Thou art mine. So be it. And the covenant, which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.