

Sermon June 14, 2015 - Pentecost 3

“What’s Done in the Body?”

2 Corinthians 5:1–10 (11–17)



For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³ if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

⁶ So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. ¹² We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. ¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

I. **Oops: We will be judged based on what we do in the body.**

In our Epistle this morning, St. Paul says, v 10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” Wait a minute! What does this mean? What does it mean that we will be judged based on what we do in the body? That doesn’t sound at all like what we Lutherans teach. And how is this related to the rest of today’s Epistle?

II. Ugh: But we can't ever do enough good to know that we'll get the glorious new body!

Well, let's look at this. Paul begins in v 1: "For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

He's talking here, at the beginning and throughout this passage, about our bodies. At some point our bodies here on earth, our earthly homes, will be destroyed. They are temporary, impermanent like a tent.

Have you ever camped in a tent? Maybe your experience is different from mine, but for me, tent camping is like this: No matter where you lie, there's a big rock sticking in your back. The wind whistles through the flaps and zippers of the tent, and you never seem to be quite warm enough. By morning, the sides of the tent are moist with condensation, and a simple touch causes a drop of water to run down the tent and drip onto your sleeping bag. Then if it rains, there's the inevitable pinprick leak in the seam right above your face. And even worse, if it storms, there's no sleep, for you worry that the tent might collapse or blow over. You're never quite comfortable or at home in a temporary dwelling like a tent . . . similarly are our bodies, non-permanent and always with something going on.

So God will give us an eternal home, an upgrade to the heavenly mansion—an immortal body that he himself has restored. Think about living in a mansion. From the outside, it will be majestic and elegant, grand and permanent. On the inside, you're protected from all those elements that can be so unsettling in a tent. You can't hear the wind howling or the thunder or the lightning. There's no condensation or leak. You live and sleep in perfect comfort: no aches, no pains. This will be your new body, your heavenly immortal home—beautiful on the outside and perfect on the inside.

Wouldn't we want to have that eternal dwelling now? Wouldn't we want to move out of the tent into the brick mansion? "For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling" (v 2).

Yes, we do want to put on the heavenly dwelling. We want to move out of the tent and into the permanent mansion that awaits. But there's a catch. Not everyone gets a glorious, eternal, permanent dwelling. Paul says: "If indeed by putting it on we

may not be found naked” (v 3). You see, in eternity we will all receive what is due: either a permanent heavenly dwelling, our bodies glorified, or our bodies stripped bare of any heavenly glory. Some will be found naked.

Paul continues: “For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (v 4). While on this earth, in our temporary dwelling of this mortal body, we groan, feeling the weight and burden of the sin that is within our flesh. It weighs us down, ages our bodies, slows our step. It puts creaks in our bones, wrinkles in our skin, shades over our eyes, and mufflers on our ears.

Then, when we move into our permanent heavenly dwelling, this current temporary tent in which we groan is not stripped away. Rather, it is further clothed; it is upgraded; it is perfected; it is swallowed up by life—eternal life, immortal life.

So why, in eternity, will some be found naked and others will be further clothed? Why will some be found without a glorious dwelling and some will live in the heavenly mansion? Here we’re back to our original question, when St. Paul says: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (v 10). Note, first of all, we must all appear before the judgment seat. No one will escape. It is before this judgment seat that each will either receive a key to that glorious heavenly mansion or will be left naked—all based on what is done in the body, while one is alive on the face of earth, whether good or evil.

Does this mean that in order to inherit the heavenly mansion we must do good in the body? Are we really judged and rewarded based on what we do? If that’s the case, how can we ever be certain that we’ve done enough? How can we ever know that, on our personal scale of justice, the good things we’ve done outweigh the sinful things?

What about those unintentional sins? Like when you blurt out something without thinking. It hurts someone, offends her, and you may not even know you did that. Those don’t count against you, do they? They weren’t intentional!

What about those sins of neglect? Like when we know somebody needs help and we don’t help. Or there’s something we know we should do but ignore it or get lazy

about doing it. Does that count as something bad done in the body? After all we didn't actually do something bad?

Or what if we've done a number of good things in the body and then we do one really bad thing? Does that wipe out all the good things? Are there different weights to the good and bad things, so that if we do some really good things it will wipe out a number of bad things? Or does each good or evil deed count only as one?

Hey, we're fooling ourselves. We're asking questions, but there's an answer. We can't ever do enough good in the body to receive the glorious heavenly dwelling! Count them however you will; we all fall short of the glory of God. So then how can we receive it?

III. Aha: It is God who does it.

Paul gives us the answer in this next verse: "He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee" (v 5). You see, left on our own, we cannot do good things. But God can. It's God who does them, and it's he who's prepared us for this new heavenly dwelling. How does he do this?

IV. Yoo-hoo!: So we are of good courage . . .

Christ does it by taking our sin, our evil deeds, into his body. He who knew no sin became sin for us (2 Cor 5:21). Then he conquered that sin within his body on the cross, so that all that's left for us is our good deeds, and those good deeds are done through the Spirit as a guarantee. God looks at you on Judgment Day, and all he sees are the good deeds the Spirit has done through you and your body, because Christ has taken away the evil deeds in his body.

"So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight" (vv 6–7). We see through the eyes of faith. In faith, we see that all of our bad deeds, our sinful deeds, are taken away in the body of Christ on the cross. In faith, we see that the Spirit is the one who does good deeds through our body. And, therefore, in faith we see that heavenly dwelling, that perfect body, which is waiting for us. "Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him" (vv 8–9).

It's like living in a tent down in the valley of a campground. Up on the hill in the distance you can see the mansion. It's a glorious mansion. You know you have a reservation there. There's a room there that's waiting for you. But you must wait. In the meantime, you persevere and live in the tent in the valley of the shadow. Yes, when the storms come through, the wind whips through the tent's flaps, and the rain drips in through the seams, the bones creak, the eyesight fails, the step slows. Yet you persevere, knowing that at some point it is guaranteed you'll move up; you will leave this temporary tent and move into that grand, permanent heavenly dwelling.

V. Yeah: . . . Even as we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

But, before that happens, before you move up, you will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. It can't be avoided, but on that day, judgment day will more a welcoming to your mansion. There you will receive what is due to you. And what is due? A permanent heavenly dwelling because Christ has taken away the evil deeds in the body, his body, and the Spirit has done good through your body, by faith. Your judgment was already taken place, your condemnation was already done away with, your punishment was taken by none other than Jesus Christ, your Lord and Savior.

Therefore, today, dear friends, live in that assurance—of good courage, Paul says—that this temporary dwelling, in which we groan, will be replaced by an eternal heavenly dwelling. It will be! Therefore we are of good courage because of what Christ has done in His Body.

In his name. Amen.