

## SERMON FOR SUN. JUNE 13 AND WED. JUNE 16, 2021

Pent 3B 2 Cor 5:1-17 “Resting in the Promises”

Dear fellow redeemed of the Lord Jesus Christ, at times, St. Paul wanted to leave this world. Life wasn't easy for him, and the thought of leaving all his pain and trouble behind sounded good. He was tired of the opposition, the floggings, the false brothers, the shipwrecks and, of course, being in prison.

Like many of the prophets who came before him, he thought heaven looked pretty good compared to what he was going through here on earth.

Perhaps you can relate. If you look at all that is going on in the world and your personal life, the problems, pain, disappointment, and trouble - and the thought of leaving this veil of tears behind sure sounds good. It's **tempting**, isn't it?

Yes, **tempting** is exactly what it is—a temptation from the devil, dressed up in pious yearning.

While you may think that wanting to leave this world and go to heaven shows your faith; in reality, it reveals your doubt - your doubt about what God is doing **now**, amidst your frustration and disappointment.

Uncertainty about His promises and care. Questions about what He is doing in you and through you.

We must be careful what we wish for. Our desires and aspirations are not always good. But God and His promises are.

That's why St. Paul, after talking about *his* groaning and longing then says: ***we are of good courage.***

It's a courage born of faith in the promises of God. It's the conviction that though we are tired, weak, frustrated, and disappointed, none of those feelings nullify the promises of God.

And so, we cling not to what we see but to those promises, which give us the courage and strength to go on.

As someone once said: ***“Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, “I will try again tomorrow.”***

One of God's promises that helps us hang in there when the going gets tough is contained in the parables in today's text. And the promise is this: that the Word of God, scattered as seed on the ground, will grow.

Though we may not see it, and it may take longer than we want, it will grow. And even the smallest seed of God's Word can grow into the largest of trees.

The seed of God's word that has been sown into your heart, and the seed that is scattered through your mouths as you witness to others, carries with it that promise.

And if you need an example of this principle of something small growing, look no farther than **Jesus Himself**. Was there ever a smaller seed planted in this world than He?

He was implanted in the womb of a young virgin who nobody knew, lived in a backwater town on the edge of the Roman Empire, grew up as a carpenter's son, and His public ministry didn't seem to be overly successful.

His closest followers, when push came to shove, proved to be disloyal. The religious establishment was against Him, and for all the miracles He did for the people, He wound up on the wrong side of the Roman government and so was crucified.

And yet, from such a small beginning, his church has survived threats, persecution, and our own sinful stupidity! From a small start, today some 2 billion people claim Christ's Name.

It's just as Jesus said, the mustard seed of the tree of the cross has become the largest of trees. People from every nation, race, and language have found their home in its shade.

Now, I know what you're thinking . . . *that's Jesus!* Of course, His efforts were blessed! That doesn't apply to my life!

But, O Christian, do you not know that it is the same Jesus who walked the dusty roads of Palestine, is working now through you?

The Word of God made flesh and planted in Bethlehem is the same Word of God which now comes and is planted in you through Holy Baptism.

The same Spirit that descended on Jesus at His baptism descended on you at your baptism.

And so, the Word of God is growing in you. It may be small, it may be slow, you may not even feel it or realize it - but it is growing. Growing and producing the fruits of faith in your life.

And just as sure as His death and resurrection **for you**, (He is risen!) is His death and resurrection **in you**.

Or as St. Paul put it: **"We regard no one according to the flesh"** - that is, according to outward appearance; for **"if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away [death]; behold, the new has come [resurrection]."**

So, as much as we may at times want to leave this life and go to heaven, realize that we have something even better: for in Jesus, **heaven has come down to us!**

Now, the devil does not want you to know that and so is constantly seeking **to blind you** to the work of God in the world and in you; **to obscure** His Word and promises; **to divert** your eyes from God's promises so that he can lead you into despair.

Satan wants you to think that you're helpless and that there is nothing you can do. You are too weak, too fickle and too doubt-filled for God to use.

But you know what? He's been whispering those same lies into the ears of Christians for thousands of years.

And in a sense, he's right. The kernel of truth to Satan's lie is that yes, **on our own**, we can do nothing. As Jesus said, "**I am the vine, you are the branches, apart from me you can do nothing.**"

But what Satan won't tell you, I'm telling you this morning. The good news is you are **not** on your own.

The Word of God, which is working in you and through you is powerful, active, living, and growing.

Your witness to others in word and in deed, is not dependent upon your eloquence, zeal and abilities - but on the One whose Word you proclaim. The Holy Spirit creates faith when and where He works through your witness.

The Kingdom's growth is dependent on the One who inhabits that Word and promises to be in that Word, whatever type of ground it falls upon.

God earnestly desires that all people be brought to repentance through the Word and saved through that same Word.

We heard that assurance and promise from God through the prophet Ezekiel this morning as well.

He, too, spoke of the great tree that God would plant and grow – Jesus, the root of Jesse, the cross and His Church.

And then we heard these words of promise at the end of Ezekiel: "**I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it.**"

Armed with the promise that the Kingdom's growth is not dependent on us, but God, we have the courage to face each day; resting in the shadow of the cross.

Resting, however, doesn't mean that we are to be idle. Godly rest means living our lives in the callings our gracious Father has given to us in the confidence and trust that He is working through us. In ways seen and unseen.

We rest in the promise that **the love of Christ controls us**. Paul is not burdening you. He's not proclaiming law, but Gospel. He's not telling you: make sure the love of Christ controls you!

No, he is telling you a present reality. For what is the love of Christ? It is the love that caused Him to come down from heaven and to live and die for you, and the love that causes Him still to come down from heaven and to feed you here with His body and blood, to forgive your sins, and to strengthen your faith.

That love given to you is the love that now defines and controls you; the love that causes you to get up and go out each day to serve others by scattering the seed of the Word with your mouth.

And to rest under the cross all through the day, knowing that our Lord has promised to work through you and through His Word to achieve His ends.

We do not need to know how or when the seeds God sows through us will flourish.

We simply cling to His promises and rest in it until the day when Jesus keeps His promise to take you to heaven.

We don't know when that day will come for any of us, but until He does, we simply cling to His promises and rest in them.

Until then, know, as St. Paul said, that you are *already* a new creation. You don't have to wait! Christ is with you even now.

His Word is sure and true. His ***I forgive you*** means you are forgiven. His ***I am with you*** means you are never alone. And His ***you are mine***, well, means just that.

We are God's children even in the midst of this world of sorrow and tears.

So, while you may be only a small seed in this great big world, but what great things God is doing in you and through you, most of which you won't realize until you get to heaven.

So rest in His promise: **"I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it."**

**AMEN**