

6/6/2021

This Too Shall Pass

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...

In the time that I have with you today I want to take a look at our reading this morning from 2nd Corinthians chapter 4 (verses 16 – 18) – where St. Paul encourages us keep the faith and not lose heart (not only in good times) but also when we find ourselves suffering for doing good (or wrestling with affliction) as we carry our crosses (like St. Paul did) along the way...

And so, I want to begin with a story about a king who had everything a man could desire... he had power, he had wealth, he had fame... but the one thing he lacked in his life was the wisdom of teachers...

Being smart enough – and valuing the best things of this world and beyond – the king knew that if he was really going to have it all – he would have to obtain this last quality in his life (so that he might learn the truth about God and Eternal Life)...

And so, in the last years of his life the king set out to meet wise teachers and religious leaders (wondering what the path to wisdom looked like – and how he could obtain it)... and one wise man after the other told him the same thing – *“to never get too attached to the things of this world – and always be prepared to meet your Maker”*...

This advice was troubling to the king because he knew in his heart that he was very attached to the comforts of his kingdom, relished in the praises of his people, and enjoyed the triumphs he encountered along the way...

“So what to do?” he wondered...

Well, he heard of a jeweler who was the finest ring maker in the kingdom (and not only was he a great ring maker) but he was also known to be a very wise man... so the king summoned the jeweler to the throne room and asked that he make a ring with an inscription that would remind him to never get too attached to this world and would always keep him prepared to die – no matter if he was happy or sad...

Well, the jeweler set out to accomplish this goal right away and kept wondering to himself what the inscription might read... finally he had it... a few weeks later the jeweler proudly stood before the king – ready to present his ring...

The jeweler began, “*Your Highness, I have inscribed a ring that will remind you to never get too attached to the things of this world – and to always be ready to die – no matter if you find yourself in triumph or despair (this ring will always remind you of the truth)*”...

With that the jeweler gave him the ring with the simple inscription, “**Remember – This Too Shall Pass**”...

Now, as you probably know, the saying “*this too shall pass*” is not found in the Bible – but if there was ever a man who would have had reason to hope it– it would have been St. Paul...

In fact, the Bible tells us that during his 20 (or so) years of ministry St. Paul was flogged 3 times, whipped with 39 lashes (5 different times), was pummeled with stones, he was robbed, thrown into prison, rejected by people in the churches he served, shipwrecked numerous times – not to mention the many times he went without food, water, or sleep... and I am sure there were so many times when he wanted his suffering to come to an end... hoping that – *this too shall pass*...

and yet, what makes St. Paul such an amazing witness to the world – and to those of us who find ourselves struggling to remain faithful in times of trial - (is that Paul kept on proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ) even in the worst of times... and what’s more – he never gave up believing (in God to see him through)... in fact, not only did he keep the faith (the Bible tells us it only made him stronger)...

In fact, this week I kept remembering the true story of an anointed, very hard-working mega-church pastor named Roy Hicks, Jr... (and what made his ministry so inspiring was not only his teaching) but that he took a small congregation of about 50 people (and in 10 short years he led it to become one of the biggest churches in America)... and everyone who served with him said the same thing – “it wasn’t easy and Roy endured so much”... and like Paul – there were plenty of sacrifices, sleepless nights, and so many critics along the way who made those 10 years very difficult...

and when he was asked about the one thing he was most proud of (in all of his accomplishments for Christ and the Church he loved) – do you know what he said?...he said, “*That I never grew cynical*”...

Perhaps this is why St. Paul is reminding the Corinthians in verse 16 (the same thing he’s reminding those of us who find it difficult to remain faithful in times of

trial) – he says, “*We do not lose heart*”... or said another way, “Christians don’t let the difficult times make us bitter – instead – we let the trials make us better”...

This is why Paul reminds us that our outer nature (meaning our body and the world around us) is “wasting away” – in other words, *this too shall pass*... but as we stay close to our Lord through the trials, and the affliction, and the setbacks, and the heartache - Paul reminds us in verse 17 (our inner nature is being renewed)... in other words, it’s the struggles that strengthen not only our faith (but also our hope - of better things to come)...

In fact, it sort of reminds me of that anonymous poem that says:

For every hill I've had to climb,
 For every stone that bruised my feet,
 For all the blood and tears and grime,
 For blinding storms and burning heat,
 My heart sings but a grateful song
 Because these were the things that made me strong!

Friends, Paul (like every one who carries their cross) found suffering in this world, but he referred to it not as the worst thing that ever happened to him... instead, he referred to it in verse 17 as a ‘*slight momentary affliction*’ – and the only reason why he could say that was because (just like you) he knew that even when we face trials ‘this too shall pass’... and let me remind you this morning – yours will too...

But what he also knew about (were the things that are everlasting) – God’s Grace, God’s love, and God’s mercy – an ‘*eternal weight of glory beyond all measure*’ he referred to it as... and even though he went through his own time of testing (Paul never took his eyes off of the prize – which was to be with our Lord) and nor should we...

This is why Paul writes these words in Phillipians 3:13, “*Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward - in Christ Jesus.*”... Paul never took his eyes off of the prize – nor should you...

So, I want to close with something that a member of this congregation said to me about 16 years ago (and always stuck with me)... His name was Mike Fostek (and he and his wife, Linda) were very active in our ministry... They were involved in worship, our outreach, our bible studies, our church dinners... you name it – they

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were there... they even helped organize an Alpha program at the apartment they lived in in Lakewood (and were responsible for leading one of their Jewish neighbors to Christ)...

Needless to say, Mike had a great faith in the Lord... the only problem was that Mike's health was terrible... in fact, when I knew him he was diabetic, he was overweight and had trouble with his feet, and towards the end (he had gotten cancer)... and so, for a few months I would go over to the apartment and bring him Communion (and we would talk)...

And when it was very clear (at least to me) that Mike wasn't going to be with us much longer, I wanted to give him a chance to make his peace and so I asked him, "Are you afraid of anything?"...

And I don't remember exactly how he said it – but I remember how he smiled (as if he didn't have a care in the world) and then said, "*I am not afraid of anything – because even this cancer brings me nearer – not to death – but to God*"...

Friends, whatever you're going through right now (put things in perspective and remember) – this too shall pass – but what will never be taken from you (is God's great love for your soul)... which is why we read in Romans 8:31 "*What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*"

May you leave the Lord's house this morning with your eyes on the prize... May you know that your afflictions will not last forever... and may the blessings of everlasting peace be the treasure you find – now and forever...

In Jesus' name we pray...

Amen!