

“Help us to walk by faith!” (2Co 5:6-19)

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. 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. 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. 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. 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. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 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. 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. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

How are you, dear Brothers and Sisters? How was your week? How is your life going? Everything is great, superb... or not. Writing to his own congregation in Corinth Paul says something that is not necessary easy to hear.

He writes: “So we are always of good courage.” He writes about himself and his fellow coworkers. They were always of good courage. I wish I could say the same things. That I am always of good courage. Can you say it about yourself?

“I am always of good courage.” Always. When things go the way that you wouldn’t want them to. When people act in a way that doesn’t make sense. When evening brings something, you couldn’t anticipate in morning.

When our hopes remain unfulfilled, when something unexpected suddenly turns your life upside down. When phone rings and the news you receive are no good at all. Wouldn’t it be great to be always of good courage? How much would you give to be always of good courage? I guess – a lot.

Then Paul goes on and speaks about our Christian reality that while we are at home in this body, we are away from the Lord. And He says that he would be rather away from this body and at home with the Lord.

Can we say the same? How often do you genuinely want to be away from this world and at home with the Lord? Sure, there are moments when experiencing the brokenness of this world, and the evil that people around us, and we ourselves are capable of, we may desire to escape this world.

But even then, how often do we genuinely want to be with the Lord and how often we just want things to get better here. And as soon as they do, we are quite okay with where we are.

The question we should ask is this, – how can Paul be so full of hope, so full of courage, so much longing for the age to come and our life with our loving God, and why do we so often find ourselves struggling?

Paul gives the answer. Because now we still walk by faith and not by sight. That's right. We walk by faith. We don't see the most of thing that are the most important for our future hopes. To Paul at least some of them were revealed.

He had seen the risen Jesus in His divine glory and majesty. He was shown the Paradise and the beauty and wonders that await all God's chosen people, but he couldn't put them in words. He had seen things that helped him to endure the incredible difficulties that he went through being the messenger of the Gospel.

He was in constant dangers, many times imprisoned, beaten countless times, often near death, stones, shipwrecked, in toil and hardship, through many sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, in cold and exposure, and so on.

But the glimpses of the glory to come, that he had seen, gave him courage – always – and peace amidst of all trials. Paul is a great example of what Christian faith truly is about. It is not about believing in something that we don't know or can't know.

It is about this firm hope in beautiful future that has been revealed to us by the One, whom we can trust more than we can trust ourselves. It is not about what we don't know, it is about what we do know, even if we haven't seen it yet.

We walk by faith. It means that we don't look at the world with the eyes of the flesh. Instead, we look with the eyes of the Spirit. Or we can say that we see the world with our ears, for that is the Word of God that reveals to us the truth.

It is the Word and the Spirit that help us to see everything differently. And this is the point that Paul is making in his letter. "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. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

Let's talk more about this. What does this mean that we regard no one according to the flesh? "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." These are very big words. They describe something too great for our eyes and minds of flesh. They describe the reality how God sees it.

First, about Christ. Thousands saw Jesus in the flesh. Almost everyone in the world has heard about the historical figure of Jesus from Nazareth. But if they know Him only according to the flesh, they know nothing.

The Spirit through the Word allows you to know Him as the Son of God, as the One through whom everything was created, as the Resurrected One, and who will come in His divine glory to judge the living and the dead.

Besides, He is the Crucified One, He is your God, He loves you so much that He sacrificed His life for you. Now, if you are in Christ, meaning, if you are united with Jesus Christ by means of His Holy Spirit, then you already belong to the age to come. You already belong to the New Creation.

We don't see it with our eyes. But our Father helps us to see it with our ears and with the eyes of the Spirit. Look around you! What you see are eternal beings. These people whom you see around you, they are a part of this new creation.

They are a part of God's eternal Kingdom. They carry in themselves the glory that is to be revealed, and that surpasses anything we have experienced here in this life. Sure, you don't see it with the eyes of the flesh.

Nevertheless, it is true. We walk by faith, and thus we may sometimes lose our courage. We may lose the sight of the great gifts that Jesus has prepared for us. They are too big for our minds. We can't grasp what it means to be without sin, without death, to live forever, to see the Holy God, to life in His presence.

And because we struggle to grasp the greatness of what is to come, sadly, but sometimes we are ready to throw it away altogether. You may have heard people saying, let not talk about these God's things, let's talk about something practical, about us, about our daily lives.

Let's not talk about wonders, and beauty and blessedness of our life with Jesus, let's not talk about this new creation, let's go back and talk about our old selves... Can you see how sad it is, when someone is ready to turn away from what is to come, and to focus only on what is now.

Paul has something to say about such people: "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." (1Co 15:19) You are a new creation. The Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead in resurrected body, the same Spirit dwells in you. Why?

So that He could raise you as He raised Jesus. And would bring you to where Jesus is, to the life of everlasting joy and blessedness in His Father's mansions. You are a new creation, already now.

Even if we can't see it with the eyes of flesh, it is how God sees you. And because we are a new creation, because God has in Christ reconciled us to Himself, we are to strive to lead new lives.

Again, Paul the apostle is so helpful in encouraging and guiding us. It is interesting how he speaks about our new lives and about our motivation. He speaks both about the fear of the Lord and about the love of the Lord.

Do you know why he speaks about both, fear and love? Because these are like two sides of the same coin – of our motivation for new life in Christ. We are to

fear the Lord so that we avoid all evil, so that we do not do wrong, because as Paul says: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”

So, we need to fear the Holy God so that we don’t do anything against His will, anything that would disappoint and anger Him. And we are to love Him. Why? Because God has loved us first, and He has not spared His own life to reconcile us with Himself. We are saved from death and eternal separation from God, and we are made members of the divine family.

Therefore, we are to make it our aim to please Him with everything we say and do. Remember how Luther summarized both these aspects, – to fear and to love God in the Small Catechism?

“God threatens to punish all that transgress His commandments. Therefore, we should dread His wrath and not act contrary to God’s commandments. [That’s the fear part.]

But He promises grace and every blessing to all that keep His commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him, and gladly do [zealously and diligently order our whole life] according to His commandments.”

This is our response to God’s love. For “the Son of God died for all, that those who live [meaning you – Christians] might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised.”

We may not see it, we may even struggle to see it with the eyes of the Spirit, but you are a new creation. The old has gone. Your Lord and God Jesus invites you to see everything according to who you truly are.

Here we are, in the Divine Service. Nothing too majestic for our eyes. But right now, right here the Triune God is among us, His Spirit is actively working with you, shaping your heart, cleansing you from your sins, making you wise.

The Sacrament. What a big deal! Our eyes don’t see it. But the eyes of faith do see. It is Jesus Himself who serves this meal. And what He Himself gives you through the hands of His servants, is the forgiveness of all your sins, and where there is forgiveness there also eternal life.

In a few minutes you will leave the service and seemingly will return to your ordinary life. But this is not what we see with the eyes of the Spirit. As you leave this workshop of the Holy Spirit, you will carry in you the Spirit of the Holy God, you will carry the message that has this power to create a new life, and you will be sent to be the light in this world of spiritual darkness. This is who you are, this is how your Father sees you. A new creation.

Sure, we don’t always have courage, we may often be overburdened with the struggles and worries of this life, but with God’s help we are learning to walk by faith, seeing everything through the eyes of the Spirit.

And as we sit at the feet of our Lord, and listen to Him, His words make us more courageous, and His Spirit creates in us ever deeper longings to be with Him, where our true eternal home is. There we will no longer walk by faith, we will walk by sight, and all our deepest longing will be fulfilled. Amen.

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