

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Pentecost 4

June 20, 2021 (Father's Day)

Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl

***How is your faith-sight?***

—2 Corinthians 5:1-10

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are. My brothers and sisters in Christ,

My children and I have found a new and exciting father-child bonding experience: scorpion hunting. Oh, it's so much fun. I have a black light, and we go outside looking for those predatory arachnids. And it is a blast. Fortunately, we haven't found too many in our yard, only one or two. None in the house. But it is a great time to see them light up when you shine the black light on them. Have you ever done that?

In their natural environment, they blend in quite well. In fact, you can't see them very well with the naked eye. Ah, but shine the black light on them, and you can see them clearly.

I am going to be so bold as to suggest that our faith is like the black light. Here is what I mean. Faith helps us see what our eyes cannot. In our reading for today, the apostle Paul says, "*We live by faith, not by sight*" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Many people may think that faith is blind, but that's not true. Faith isn't blind. Rather, it's like the black light that sheds light on things so that we can see.

There are at least two things that the apostle Paul wants to help us see today. 1) He wants our faith-sight to see our permanent home, and 2) He wants our faith-sight to see God's judgment throne. And when we see those things properly, it helps us live our lives in this world with proper perspective.

As a father, I am regularly looking for bonding experiences with my children. Not only do we go scorpion hunting together, but I also like to take them camping. We have a camper, but one of the things I absolutely love is backpacking in the wilderness with people. And I take my children on trips like that.

One of the themes of Scripture is that we are on a journey through this life. That is how we are to approach living in this world. We are just passing through. We are on a camping trip, heading to our permanent home.

Paul put it like this: "*Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life*" (2 Corinthians 5:1-4). Paul compares the life we have now (our body, our life in this world) to living in a tent. I absolutely love camping, even in a tent. But do you know what the best part of camping is? Coming home! After sleeping on the ground and in a tent for a time, there is nothing better than being in your house and sleeping in your bed.

Without faith-sight, without the black light of our faith shining on this world, we would think, "This is it. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die. When you die, that's the end." Without faith-sight, we would become more concerned about building up our bank account than building up our faith in Jesus. Without faith-sight, we might browse dozens of websites to diagnose our latest ailment and try to find a cure, but we would completely miss the root of all our ailments is sin. We would miss what is most important: God's Word which heals our sin-sick souls. Without faith-sight, we might be tempted to think that we need to invest all our time and energy into the things of this world. Without faith-sight, Satan would dupe us into thinking that this body, this tent, this world is home sweet home.

But with the black light faith, we see something completely different. This isn't our home. No, this life is just temporary. We have a better home, an eternal home we're headed to. This heavenly home is so great because it's built, not with human hands which all too often deliver shoddy workmanship, but it's built by God himself. I am so thankful that I am not going to camp in this tent forever. It's only temporary, for a time. That is so encouraging because the aches and pains that you endure are not going to last. Paul says that we will continue to groan as we endure this life. We groan because our body doesn't work the way it should. We groan because the person we married turns out to be a sinner and not the Mr. or Ms. Perfect we thought. We groan because our children disappoint us or because our parents seem to care more about their work than they do about us.

We groan, but we do not despair. You see, it's okay to groan. It's okay to long for our heavenly home. It's good to yearn for our home. Our faith-sight sees our heavenly home.

This truth really hits home when we face death. A friend of mine just had a tragic event happen in his life this past week. His mother was instantly killed in a car accident, and his younger sister is in critical condition. I was thankful for the opportunity to study these words this week because I shared with him the truth of our heavenly home. We long for death to be swallowed up and defeated. *“For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life”* (2 Corinthians 5:4). I absolutely love the picture that Paul paints for us.

The Greek word for swallow is intense. It comes across that way in English too. It has the thought of swallowing something completely. It is used in Hebrews 11 to describe how the Lord our God swallowed the Egyptian army in the waters of the Red Sea. It is used in 1 Corinthians 15:54 where it says, *“death has been swallowed up in victory.”* In Revelation, God describes the new life waiting for us after we die in this way. *“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away”* (Revelation 21:4). Our faith sees what we cannot see with our eyes. We see our heavenly home. We are connected to Jesus who victoriously walked away from death alive. He has guaranteed that truth for us as well.

But how can we be sure that this is real? How can we be absolutely certain that these aren't just some pious wishes to help us get through tough times? How do I know that there is something better than just living in this world?

Listen again to Paul. *“Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 5:5-8).

God wants you to have confidence about this. He wants you to know without a doubt that what he promises will absolutely come true. So how does he guarantee that promise?

He gives you a deposit. My wife and I purchased our first house. A bank actually gave us money so that we could buy a house. We only have 357 more monthly payments to go. When we purchased our house, we needed to give a deposit. It was a down payment, earnest money. We put money down as a promise that the best was yet to come.

God has given you a deposit, earnest-money, a down payment guaranteeing that the best is yet to come. And did you see what the down payment is? It's the Holy Spirit. Talk about an amazing deposit! God the Holy Spirit is living inside of you, guaranteeing what is to come. The Holy Spirit is God's promise that the best is yet to come.

So how do you know that you have the Holy Spirit? You can't see him. You can't feel him. Emotions are a fickle thing. Here's where God's gift of faith shines like a black light. Faith sees God's promises and says, “Yes, it's true. There it is. I see it.” Faith is like the “Amen” to the promises of God.

Promises like this: *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved”* (Mark 16:16). God also promises that those who have been baptized have received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38,39). And if I have not continually rejected God's Word since my baptism, I can be certain that the Holy Spirit is still with me. I know where I am going, and so do you. Heaven is my home.

As long as we are journeying through this life, we need our faith-sight to see correctly. But our faith-sight also helps us see how to live our lives for God today. Paul writes, *“So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad”* (2 Corinthians 5:9,10).

Our faith-sight not only sees our permanent home in heaven, but it also sees how to live for God. We want to please God. We want to follow what he reveals to us in his Word.

In all of Paul's letters, you will notice the emphasis he has on living in this world. There is this backdrop behind everything he writes. It's Judgment Day. The day is coming when we will be ushered before the judgment seat. But notice what Paul's calls the judgment seat. Paul could have said, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of the Lord or Almighty God.”* That would have been correct. But he specific says, *“the judgment seat of Christ.”* We will stand before the one who was appointed, set aside, to save us from sin. Our Judge is also our Savior. He is the one who stood before Pontius Pilate and received the verdict “guilty” so that we would never have to.

How awful it would be to stand before the judge without Christ to wash us clean of our sin. You see, I desire to please the Lord with my life, but I fail miserably and so do you. I even fail in my best efforts to love the Lord with all my heart, soul and mind. I fail to love my neighbor as much as I love myself.

Yet, I can stand before God in the final judgment because Jesus has washed me clean of every part of life in this old tent where I have failed. Even my best efforts to please God that are marred by sin are washed clean and made acceptable.

Through Jesus, we will hear the verdict at that judgment, *“Well, done, good and faithful servant”* (Matthew 25:23). God will look at our works done through faith and say, “Well, done!”

You have heard people say, “You can’t take anything with you when you die.” That’s not entirely true. We can take with us the investments we have made in Jesus and his kingdom. In Revelation, God says, *“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”* *“Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them”* (Revelation 14:13). You and I will go to heaven, but there are fruits and deeds that will follow us.

This is one of the reasons why I want to be a good Christian father to my children. I want to put a spiritual investment in their lives as God in his own way will bring those labors to fruition. The investments we make in Jesus and his kingdom are the only things we can take out of this world.

We wouldn’t see any of that without faith. God has given us faith to shine these truths in our lives. So how is your faith-sight? By God’s grace, you can say, “My faith-sight is 20-20.” Amen.