

Consider Those Birds in the Bush
Psalm 130 and II Corinthians 4:7-5:1, 5
6 June 2021 – Bon Air Presbyterian Church

Something interesting happened this **week** – it was interesting to me, anyway. When I opened my Bible and took a look at the lectionary passage for this Sunday – the one from II Corinthians – a phrase popped into my mind. For who knows **what** reason, I thought: *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.* That's a way of saying something like... what? – *It's **better** to hold onto something one **has** than to risk **losing** it by trying to get something better.* Maybe? It sounds reasonable... and practical... the kind of thing **many** of us would nod in agreement over. (We do tend to be **practical** people, we Presbyterians.)

But, **after** musing a bit more on the **passage** this week, I am not so sure that **Paul** would be nodding **with** us. Instead, I think, **Paul** might counsel us to consider **those** birds in the **bush** a little more carefully. *You might realize they're worth a whole lot more than the bird in your hand,* the Apostle would say. *That's what I've found, anyway!*

Let's hear what Paul **wrote** to the church in Corinth and see what you think about those birds in the bush. And bear in mind – the Corinthian Christians were being maligned and persecuted because of their faith in Christ, and Paul was doing his best to encourage them... by sharing with them **how** he saw things... **why** he saw them as he did... and what helped him endure his own persecution and pain... which, as we know, was pretty profound. Beginning with chapter four, verse seven, Paul writes:

We – that is, all of us Christians – *we have this **treasure*** – that is, our knowing of God in Christ – *we have this treasure in **clay jars*** – that is, our mortal bodies – *so that it may be made **clear** that this extraordinary **power** belongs to **God** and does **not** come from us.*

*We are **afflicted** in every way... but not crushed; **perplexed**... but not driven to despair; **persecuted**... but not forsaken; **struck down**... but not destroyed; always **carrying in the body the death** of Jesus, so that the **life** of Jesus may **also** be made*

visible **in our bodies**. For while we live, we are **always** being **given up to death** for Jesus' sake... so that the **life of Jesus** may be made visible **in our mortal flesh**. So, death is at work in us, but life in you.

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture – “I believed, and so I **spoke**” – we **also** believe, and so we speak, because we **know** that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence.

Yes, everything is for **your** sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So, we do not **lose heart**. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight **momentary** affliction is preparing us for an **eternal weight** of glory beyond all measure... because we **look not** at what can be **seen** but at what **cannot be seen**; for what can be **seen** is temporary, but what **cannot be seen** is eternal. For we **know** that if the **earthly tent** we live in is **destroyed**, we have a **building** from God... a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. He who has prepared us for **this very thing** is God, who has given us the **Spirit** as a **guarantee**.

We **know** we **have** a **building** from God waiting for us in the heavens, Paul proclaims – the big bushy heavens! We know **because** God has given us the Spirit - who guarantees it! **God** guarantees it! And so, we **look** for it, confidently. Even **though** we **cannot see** it now, we **look** for it! We expect it. Just **because** we cannot **see** it now, there's no reason to think we won't inhabit it... to think it's not awaiting us... to think it's not **already** ours, eternal in the heavens. This is **not** “wishful thinking”. It's **not** simply **imagining** something. God's **Spirit** guarantees it! God's Spirit, now **stirring** in the heart of each one of us,

guarantees it! And on **that** basis... because of **that**... we do not **lose** heart. Even when **afflicted**... in every way... when perplexed, persecuted, or struck down, we do not lose **heart**. Sickness. Setbacks. The loss of our loved ones. Conflict. Failures. Betrayals. Still, we do not lose heart. God has built resilience into us. Faith. Hope. And love abide in our mortal flesh. And, **sometimes**, even “the life of Jesus” may be seen in us! (Have you not seen it in others here, a time or two?) God give **us eyes** to see it and to show it!

You know, many persons have an inner **something** within them – an inner **artist**, yearning for the chance to express itself... an inner **leader** which, when circumstances summon it, emerges and shows others the way forward... an inner **tiger** that, when a child’s imperiled, roars to its defense.

I wonder if any of you might have an inner **Paul**? It would be good to get in **touch** with that part of you... to give it some play... let it run... show its stuff. There’d **be good** stuff to show... useful stuff, too. **Practical** things, in fact – resiliency... courage... generosity... hopefulness... graciousness... the life of Christ, visible in this world. It could make a real difference in this world, for those with whom you live. I **imagine** it could. Well, no... I **know** that it could... if only we would!

I’ll end with this: In the hymnal I used in my formative years there’s a prayer that sings just beautifully. It **also** popped into **mind** this week as I considered those birds in the bush... I mean, the dwellings in heaven awaiting us, guaranteed by the Spirit right here, right now.

My heart is resting, O my God, I will give thanks and sing;
My heart is at the secret source of every precious thing.
I thirst for springs of heavenly life, and here all day they rise;
I seek the treasure of Thy love, and close at hand it lies.

I have a heritage of joy, that yet I must not see;
But the hand that bled to make it mine is keeping it for me.
And a new song is in my mouth, to long-loved music set:
Glory to Thee for all the grace I have not tasted yet.

The table is set... and by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the bread of life and the cup of salvation will soon be ours to taste. And we shall see... we shall taste **and** see... that the Lord is good! God’s steadfast love endures forever!