

*“So We Do Not Lose Heart”*

Sermon for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Decatur,  
Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, June 10, 2012

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 4:13--5:1

*13 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, <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>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.*

*16 So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, <sup>18</sup>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.*

*5 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.*

***So We Do Not Lose Heart***

In the face of life's challenges it is so easy to lose heart, to give up or give in,

to take on an attitude of cynicism or nihilism or fatalism.

In William Shakespeare's play King Lear, the king says,

*"Thou know'st, the first time that we smell the air we wawl and cry --"*

Thank God that the good Lord gives to the whole people of God

pastors and prophets and parishioners who have a spirit of hope,

who see life not as a journey toward death

but as one of living fully and completely into being a blessing.

Paul certainly believed this.

As Paul believed, he spoke.

You may have heard me say before that the Apostle Paul's theology was solid

while his sociology was lacking.

In my opinion Paul did well when he focused on God-talk, on Christ and grace,

and on our blessed relationship with the holy;

on some occasions he stuck his foot in a bucket

when his personal prejudices came through in his attempts

to tell people how to live in  
community.

He was a child of his generation,

and I pray daily that folks take that reality in consideration  
when they speak of “the inerrancy” of Scripture.

Paul wrote lots of letters,

many of which were preserved and published,  
and all of which speak with conviction and passion.

In his letter to the church in Corinth,

Paul touches on a subject we think about often  
yet rarely discuss out loud.

He wrote about the fact that we slide toward physical death  
in the declining years of our lives.

Our heightened sense of our mortality impacts our world  
view.

Yet Paul’s thoughts are filled with hope.

He writes as he believes.

Listen again to a portion of his letter (2 Cor. 4:16--5:1):

*“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.”*

Paul is bold to say out loud that despite all attempts contrariwise,  
all through life it must happen that a person's bodily strength  
fades away;  
all through life it also happens that a person's soul keeps  
growing;  
all through life it happens that we are assured and reassured  
of God's gift of the Holy Spirit,  
a gift of hope,  
a gift of life,  
a gift which enables us to live

on and on

in “*a house not made  
with hands,*

*eternal in the  
heavens.”*

Paul writes to the church such a letter of hope and faith!

*“So we do not lose heart. (!)*

*Even though our outer nature is wasting away,*

*our inner nature is being renewed day by day.”*

Paul does not lose heart over his or anyone else’s body’s aging process,

for he recognizes that this vulnerable temple given to us by God

is but a flimsy, temporary tent

which will one day have to be dismantled.

He does not lose heart over this,

for he sees with his inner eye

that God renews our Spirits and transforms our lives day by day.

*“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.”*

Agatha Christie, the late mystery writer,

was married to H. E. Mallowen, the famous archeologist.

Agatha Christie said, *“There are some tremendous advantages*

*to marrying an archeologist.*

*For one thing, the older I get,*

*the more interested he becomes in  
me.”*

We may laugh at her sense of humor

but would you say that in our society the opposite is true?

The older one becomes, it may feel as if the less people are interested  
in you.

Hollywood and the advertising media

have focused on the vibrancy of youth

rather than on the commitment and accomplishments

of our elders and senior generations.

Our collective fear of aging has been tapped into

by the messages that bombard us daily

in the media and on the screens we stare at with  
increasing regularity.

Consequently we become overly sensitive -- fearful, even -- about

aging,

doing all we can to look and sound and act young(er).

The Good News is that when we turn to the Holy Scriptures

we are delighted to discover that the Bible offers

a different, healthy approach to aging

and respecting our natural state of being.

You are made in the image of God.

God made you and is remaking you every day,

and the Lord looks upon you and says, "This is good!"

As we age we can be and are renewed by Christ day by day.

Our temporary housing goes through natural and unnatural processes,

sometimes painful, sometimes uncomfortable, sometimes disconcerting.

We have scars on our skin and scars in our hearts.

We have memories and stories to tell,

and still we have a vision of a brighter tomorrow today.

Our story is not done;

the narrative of our lives is still being written, created, dreamed,

lived out and lined into and lived aloud.

We have this faith that this very minute  
our eternal home is being prepared  
as we live and grow as disciples of Christ.

Our eternal home is being prepared  
by the loving grace of God.

And if God's grace is true, than all will be saved, all will be redeemed,  
all will be received.

***So we do not lose heart.***

I am going to tell some short stories about my ancestors  
who impacted and touched my life, and consequently, your  
life as well.

Feel free to tune me out.

Daydream and let your mind wander  
as you remember those whose gifts of the spirit  
emboldened and engaged the Spirit of God which has  
been given to you.

In February 1997, I walked into the office of Professor Malcolm  
Warford

for an interview to be considered for the Doctor of Ministry  
Degree program

at Lexington Theological Seminary.

The first thing Dr. Warford said was, “*You look like your grandfather.*”

You see, Malcolm Warford had served as one of the ministers  
at my grandparents’ church in Scarsdale, New York  
in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

After he told me I looked like my then-80-year-old paternal grandfather,

he softened the blow by telling me that he greatly admired Robert Calvert.

When Robert Calvert stepped into an elevator with total strangers,  
he would immediately introduce himself to everyone.

By the time the elevator would reach the seventh floor,

everybody would know everyone else,

including their birthplaces

and where they worked and lived and why they were there.

Mary, my grandmother, would be completely embarrassed and melt into a corner.

Malcolm Warford then told me a story during the interview.

One day Warford was standing on line at a bank in Scarsdale.

He had just begun to grow a beard, which he still has to this day.

He heard someone behind him say, *“Tsk, tsk! I don’t like it. I just don’t like it.”*

He turned around to see who it was; there stood my grandmother, Mary Calvert.

She told him in no uncertain terms what she thought of his new facial hair.

My grandmother, Mary, was called Marm by her eight grandchildren.

I spent a lot of time staying with Marm after Grandpa passed away in 1969.

I like to remember that she helped raise me.

I will forever be indebted to the faith and love she passed on to me in our time together.

If Dr. Warford had said, “You look like your grandmother.”

I would have known that he was looking into my soul  
rather than at my physical facial structure and  
receding hairline.

One of my best memories of Marm is watching her in her sitting room,

with lots of windows and lots of natural light.

She would sit there and write letters.

Marm wrote lots of letters.

She got all the autographs of the New York Mets for her grandsons

and would praise the team players to high heavens...

but if she saw a baseball player start to grow a mustache or beard,

he could expect a letter or two from her. *Tsk, tsk.*

As she believed, she spoke.

As Marm aged and entered her seventies and eighties,

she began to write letters to men in prisons across the Southern United States.

Maybe she did so because she was raised a Disciple of Christ in the South.

Maybe she did so because she had an inherent gift of compassion for others.

Maybe she did so because, as her body grew weaker, her soul grew stronger.

Whatever her reason, I remember Marm corresponding with men in prisons.

She communed with men she never knew before

and would never, ever meet face-to-face.

She grew to love these men and treated them as loved children of God.

She would send birthday cards and anniversary cards.

She would write to their wives and children.

She would often include in her notes and cards a small check,

a gift given unconditionally,

for them to use as they wished, expecting nothing in return.

I remember her joy when they were released to return home

and her sadness when one man was executed.

She never understood how our society could justify killing someone

to show them that killing someone was wrong.

She believed in the power of God to transform;

she believed it was never too late to save a soul and lead one to Christ.

As she believed, she spoke.

And as her body aged, her spirit grew stronger.

In her letters and in her daily life you could see her spirit grow

Throughout her life she demonstrated the importance of loyalty.

When my father, George Calvert, preached one of his first sermons,

it was on a Sunday morning when the entire congregation

had gone to the park for a picnic.

Someone had to stay behind and preach, and that someone was George.

There were only four people in the sanctuary that morning:

George, his seminary roommate, his mother, Marm, and a 12-year-old boy.

After worship was over George said to Marm, *“I am so impressed that young man stayed through the whole service when he could have gone on the picnic!”*

Marm said, *“He better have. I paid him 50 cents!”*

As Marm believed, she spoke.

***So we do not lose heart.***

We have this hope!

Let us not waste a single day in the temporary shelter in which we live.

When Pablo Cassals was 93 years old

an interviewer found out Pablo still practiced cello for 5 or 6 hours per day.

*“Pablo, why do you still practice the cello? You are 93 years old!”*

He answered, *“Because I think I am still making some progress.”*

As Pablo believed, so he practiced.

As you believe, so may you speak.

As you believe, so may you live.

As you believe, so may you continue to gracefully age

and gratefully grow in knowledge and faith,  
As you believe, so may you be filled with the hope of the Spirit of God.  
And when people encounter you,  
may they look into your soul  
and observe that you look like your Creator.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*