

4:13 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, 14 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. 15 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.*

17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, 18 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.

5:1 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.

Today's sermon is the second in a month long series, based upon the one verse: 2 Corinthians 5:17: **So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!**

Last week, in the first sermon of the series, the change was described in BIG, dramatic terms, "In the year King Uzziah died ..." began the telling. And God was pictured as high and lifted up, filling the whole temple. And it was a powerful and awesome experience – one that no one present could ignore.

Sometimes, that is how God interrupts our life and brings about change – in a BIG Steven Spielberg movie kind of way, with lots and lots of "special effects."

Today's scripture shows us a different way that God intervenes in our lives. If last week were the THUNDER AND LIGHTNING God, this week shows us the quiet and gentle rain that comes almost unnoticed, but which grows, sustains, and changes us into "**a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new**" kind of person.

It happens all the time – DAY BY DAY. Only thing is: sometimes we just miss seeing it, miss experiencing it, only experience it in "*cerebral theory,*" but not in "*heart reality.*"

But – see it or experience it, or not – the reality is true, just as today’s scripture reads: every day “**our outer nature is wasting away.**”

“**Saint Leo**” – not some canonized saint in the catholic church, but the wise, wise old man who taught my pastoral ministry licensing school, in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania – taught us newbie preachers: **The day we are born, we are old enough to die.**

And, despite any- and every-thing else that goes on, that is the direction these physical bodies are headed. Like it or not, accept it or not, that is the truth.

HOWEVER, in the midst of that hard reality, Saint Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: ***Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.***

God at work – like a gentle daily rain. Have you noticed?

Let me caution us: what is being described by Paul is **a reality IRRESPECTIVE of whether or not** we pay attention.

One of the great American preachers, and now retired seminary professor, Fred Craddock, notes that he has seen the process happen with seminary students:

“[The student just] gives up. Not suddenly but rather slowly, zeal cools, faith weakens, appetite for Christian enterprise disappears, the wellspring dries up, the soul becomes parched, and the eyes droop gloomy and listless. What happened? Did evil storm the seminary’s citadel and take over? No. Did much study drive him or her into doubt? No. Did attractive alternatives to ministry turn the head? No. Nothing quite so dramatic. The seminarian simply made the fatal error of assuming that spending so much time talking ABOUT God was an adequate substitute for talking WITH God.

His doxology [“song of praise and gratitude”] was lost and spiritual death followed.”

God can work in our lives, growing us from the inside out, like a gentle rain, but Fred Craddock also describes how, from the inside out, we can grow cold to God, and how, from the inside out, our soul can join our bodies in wasting away, day by day.

Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

Are you paying attention?

You’ve probably seen the bumper stickers that read: “I’d rather be playing golf” or “I’d rather be fishing.” Well there’s a new one – and I think it’s based on today’s scripture. I just saw it recently: **I’D RATHER BE HERE NOW.**

Let me share with you an epiphany that came upon me – my Journal tells me that it was on Wednesday, May 30. It came to me like this:

“Chef Wong – 50 years old – died on the tennis court.

“Coach Bill Stewart – 6 months younger than me – died on the golf course.

“Harriet Morton – 85 years old – suffered her mortal stroke while playing her favorite game, rummycube.

“All of these deaths came as a surprise.

“All of these people had plans for what they were going to do after playing tennis, golf, and rummycube.

“All of them had plans for their tomorrow, their next week, their next month, etc.

“They never got to do any of those things. They never got to make any changes. One minute they were here; the next, it was all over.”

Well, actually, that journal entry on May 30 was just the beginning of the epiphany for me. It took a day for that thought to settle down through the silt of my mind, to the place of my heart. My journal entry from the next day continued the process:

“The notation of yesterday’s journal has continued today – but not in a morose way. Rather (1) I have been often reminded to pay attention to the moment, to drink it in as though it were my last moment I lived; and (2) I have felt a strong sense of release about concern for all the tomorrows.”

- ⌘ The change in my life, once I began to pay attention to each sky – like it might be the last time I’d see clouds like that, before all **sight** stopped – was incredible.
- ⌘ When I **listened** to birds singing, like I might never hear them again, even though I mostly ignored hearing them throughout most days – it was amazing.
- ⌘ When I **looked upon people**, whose lives were intersecting mine in this moment, as though I might never be granted a chance to see them again, it made them more precious than whether or not that person and I were in agreement about a particular thing.
- ⌘ When I paid attention to how something **felt, tasted, smelled**, as though I might never have that experience again, ***I felt my whole inner self being changed, powerfully, moment by moment.*** Somehow ***each moment of time was being enlarged*** to include much more than the same length of time had previously encompassed.

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, ... 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.

I'd like to tell you that I have been released from all concerns about all my tomorrows. I'd like to tell you that I am constantly aware of God at work in each moment of my life.

But, if I did, there are people who know me who would tell you that this is a lie. It's not been every moment of every day.

But, I can tell you this: since I have begun to practice this "bumper sticker" of **I'D RATHER BE HERE NOW** I am spending a lot more time in drinking up the exciting experience of watching what God really is doing **RIGHT NOW**, than in squandering so much of my life in worrying about yesterday or about tomorrow.

Oh, it's something I've known about for a long time – in my head. But it wasn't until the reality of the fragile nature of these mortal bodies was brought home to me by the quick succession of these three persons' reunification with their Maker, that the reality of that notion traveled that longest 14 inches in the world – from mind to heart.

Our outer natures are wasting away, my sisters and brothers. But, inside us, God is working, day by day. We have a choice to either pay attention to the nurturing of a gentle falling rain – or to fritter our lives away while we await God to only act in a powerful thunder storm.

Part of the problem is that if we only find God in the thunderstorm, we may drift away so much from seeing God at work daily, that we forget to look at all.

“So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

God loves us just as we are. Nothing can change that. But **God also wants to make us into something new** – not more loveable, but more

vibrant, more alive, closer to the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said He came to give us life, not just eternal, but also ABUNDANT.

I encourage you to PAY ATTENTION. Treat each moment like it might be your last – not just because that's true – but also because it is in paying such rapt attention to the life of this moment, that we are able to experience God at work in us NOW. And NOW is the only time in which we actually live. We can think about yesterday and about tomorrow. But we can only live in the NOW.

And when we do, it's just amazing to experience God.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.