

The Parable of Four Wives  
 Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV Third Sunday of Pentecost (June 7) 2015

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

<sup>4:13</sup> Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, <sup>14</sup> knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. <sup>15</sup> For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

<sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. <sup>5:1</sup> For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

**"Saint Leo,"** I called him. His real name was Leo Cramer. He was my Local Pastoral Ministry Licensing School teacher. For four weekends, I traveled to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania to sit at the feet of this old – in his last year before retirement – elder, who gave us the benefits of his wisdom about how to do ministry. In some ways, what he taught me was far more important to my ministry than what a three year Master of Divinity degree in seminary taught.

One of the aphorisms I learned, and have not forgotten in 23 years of ministry is this: **The day you are born, you are old enough to die. Don't ever forget it!**

We go through life, and no tomorrow is ever promised. We need to remember that. The events of the past two weeks here at church have reminded me of the fragility of life, and the incredible difference just a few moments can make. So many people ended up in the hospital when they never thought of it when they awoke that morning.

When we *pass the peace* later in worship, pay attention to life in THAT moment. For we never know if that person will be the same the next time we see them.

But, if we are graced to live past middle age, we will discover that the journey is not always easy. The words of our hymn we sang, *“I Was There To Hear Your Boring Cry,”* point out to us some of the foibles of each age. The words about the older years are becoming more real to me, and the words about the younger years are more and more of a delightful memory.

But, if we are graced to live past middle age, we WILL discover that the words which Paul wrote are quite true:

**[O]ur outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison**

As a wise man once said: **It takes a lifetime to prepare a soul for eternity.**

But, the corollary to that is: **PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR SOUL AS YOU HEAD IN THAT DIRECTION.**

Those of you who attended the memorial worship for Erma Griffith two days ago heard me opine about the lesson Erma taught me in my last home visit, before she went into the hospital for the last time. At this visit, Erma had been bedfast for about ten days. She told me that she really missed being able to come to church.

That I had heard her say before, during visits with her since she had become homebound. But then she said something else:

***And I really miss being able to come home from church and do chores around the house – simple things, you know. But chores. I miss being able to do chores.***

As we grow, as “our outer self is wasting away,” our priorities and perspectives surely do change. That’s a given.

But we don’t HAVE to appreciate things, ONLY AFTER we are unable to do them.

Take stock, my sisters and brothers. What REALLY is important in your life? What is better for you to invest more energy into, while you still can?

The sermon last week, “Living in the Moment,” got very little response right after I preached it, on Sunday morning. But I’ve heard a lot more response about it, later during the week. That tells me that people have been thinking about it. I like it when the sermon actually prompts people to think, and is not just a momentarily feel good experience.

Life is far too precious for us to squander it. Pay attention to that which needs your nourishment for the rest of life, and even eternity. Perhaps this parable can explain it better:

Once upon a time, there was a rich King – perhaps it was back in First Testament times, because this king had four wives. He **loved the fourth wife the most** and adorned her with rich robes and treated her to the finest of delicacies. He gave her nothing but the best.

He also **loved the third wife very much and was always showing her off to neighboring kingdoms**. However, he feared that one day she would leave him for another.

He also loved his **second wife**. She was **his confidant and was always kind, considerate and patient with him**. Whenever the King faced a problem, he could confide in her, and she would help him get through the

difficult times.

The King's first wife was a very loyal partner and had made great contributions in maintaining his wealth and kingdom. However, he did not love the first wife. Although she loved him deeply, he hardly took notice of her!

One day, the King fell ill and he knew his time was short. He thought of his luxurious life and wondered, "I now have four wives with me, but when I die, I'll be all alone."

Thus, he asked the fourth wife, "I have loved you the most, endowed you with the finest clothing and showered great care over you. Now that I'm dying, will you follow me and keep me company?"

"No way!" replied the fourth wife, and she walked away without another word. Her answer cut like a sharp knife right into his heart.

The sad King then asked the third wife, "I have loved you all my life. Now that I'm dying, will you follow me and keep me company?"

"No!" replied the third wife. "Life is too good! When you die, I'm going to remarry!"

His heart sank and turned cold. He then asked the second wife, "I have always turned to you for help and you've always been there for me. When I die, will you follow me and keep me company?"

"I'm sorry, I can't help you out this time!" replied the second wife. "At the very most, I can only send you to your grave."

Her answer came like a bolt of lightning, and the King was devastated.

Then a voice called out: "I'll go with you and follow you no matter where

you go." The King looked up, and there was his **first wife**. She was so skinny as she suffered from malnutrition and neglect. Greatly grieved, the King said *"I should have taken much better care of you when I had the chance!"*

In truth, **we all have these four spouses** in our lives:

Our fourth is our BODY. No matter how much time and effort we lavish in making it look good, it will leave us when we die.

Our third is our POSSESSIONS, STATUS and WEALTH. When we die, it will all go to others.

Our second is our FAMILY and FRIENDS. No matter how much they have been there for us, the furthest they can stay by us is up to the grave.

And our first is our Soul – the one so often neglected in pursuit of wealth, power and pleasures of the world.

However, our Soul is the only thing that will follow us wherever we go. So cultivate, strengthen and cherish it now, for it is the only part of us which will follow us to the throne of God and continue with us throughout Eternity.

**[O]ur outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. It takes a lifetime to prepare a soul for eternity.**

**May those who have ears listen.**

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