

Near St. Louis, Missouri where our daughter Stephanie and our son-in-law Jon live while he's going to Seminary, there stands a billboard by the Interstate that grabs a person's attention. On this sign was a picture of a runner in a crouch position from the starting blocks. One of his legs had one of those springy-type devices that make possible running and athletic activities for someone who no longer has that part of the leg. Four words were written on the billboard: "Lost leg. Not heart." Whatever happened to that person's leg, whatever may have caused a disability, whatever physical difficulty occurred, he did not give up. He did not become so discouraged that he gave out. He was not so beaten down that he would give in and lose hope. He did not lose heart.

The apostle Paul is telling us the same thing: "So we do not lose heart" (v 16). No matter what may be going on around us, no matter how much we're going through with the frailty and failing of our own bodies, our mental capacities, our emotions, we do not lose heart. We don't get so discouraged that we give up. We're not so worn out that we give in. We don't give out. We don't lose hope. We do not lose heart.

But you may ask, "Paul, don't you know what's going on? What's going on around us in our own lives weighs us down. It's heavy. Even though you may call it light and momentary, it doesn't feel light, and it doesn't seem momentary."

What's going on around us? Violence is running rampant in cities. A Minneapolis Police officer ambushed and assassinated just over a week ago. Millions of immigrants streaming across our border illegally. An extremely heated Presidential election campaign. Looking back over the past four years, it's clear that the aftereffects of COVID have isolated us, put us Americans at odds with one another, and we have difficulty getting back together again. Inflation has hit our budgets hard. It now becomes all the more difficult to buy milk, eggs, and gas. All of this is very alarming. What's more, it is getting harder and harder to live as a follower of Christ while living in a cultural environment that is increasingly hostile to the truth of His Word. We live in an age of uncertainty and increased anxiety, when more and more people give up and give out and give in. People lose hope. Too many lose heart.

That's what's going on around us, but personally we know our own frailties, failings, and weaknesses. As another birthday approaches for me, I am reminded that I likely have had more birthdays in the past, than I will in the future. I think about my Grandpa Welch who only made it to 49, my grandpa Hoskins who suffered a stroke in his early 60's. As much as I don't like to admit

it, I can recognize that it often takes me a little longer than it used to to remember names, places, or why in the world I even entered a room in the first place! Then I think about my parents, my brother, my uncle, my father-in-law, all who have died over the past 19 months. Perhaps you have family members that you have lost or are currently suffering with ailments like diabetes, Parkinson's, heart disease, cancer. The list could go on.

Maybe you're afraid for a child who may go astray from family or faith. Perhaps it's now time for you to start taking care of your parents. You can fill in what's going on within your own life. Some days it's **not** light, it's extremely heavy. Some days it's **not** momentary, it's long.

So, we ask, "How, Paul, can you say that all of this, which weighs so heavily upon us, which we can see going on around us and within us, how can you say it's light and momentary? How can you say we do not lose heart, we do not give up or give out or give in to it?"

The answer to those questions comes straight from Paul's heart. In 2 Corinthians, Paul is at his most vulnerable; he reveals more about himself, his own emotions, and what he has gone through than in any other of his writings. At the beginning of 2 Corinthians, he simply says this: "We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death" (1:8-9). "Utterly burdened," "beyond our strength," "the sentence of death." In chapter 4, right before the words we heard today, he used words like "perplexed," "struck down," "afflicted," "persecuted." Paul's life was one of ridicule. He was run out of town, beaten up, whipped, thrown into jail, shipwrecked, and bitten by a snake; he knows his own death will be one as a martyr for the faith.

He knows. He knows the weight. He knows what he sees. He knows what he has gone through. So how does **he** not lose hope? How does he not lose heart? It's all because of Christ's resurrection. In that first chapter, listen to what comes next: "We had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead" (1:9). And in our reading for this message: "We also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence" (vv 13b-14). Everything changed when Christ rose from the dead.

Paul sees what's going on around him, but he believes in Christ's resurrection. He's on the road to Damascus. His name is Saul. He has letters allowing him to arrest and persecute Christians. He'll have them thrown in jail. He wants Christians put to death. Then the blinding light comes. The

resurrected Christ appears to him on that road. He calls out, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Paul replies, "Who are you?" The answer: "I am Jesus." At that moment, Saul dies, and Paul comes to life. That resurrection experience is the basis of and energy for all that Paul does and what he writes in his letters. His whole ministry flows out of Christ's resurrection and leads him to say, "We do not lose heart."

You see, he knows what's coming. A day will come, a final day, a day of resurrection of the dead. This is the day when Jesus returns, and as Christ rose from the dead, so will Paul, so will we. We will rise with our bodies immortal, imperishable. We will experience no more tears, no more pain, no more grief, no more failings or frailty. No more! Our bodies will be glorified in that final day of resurrection. So, Paul speaks what his heart believes. He proclaims what's to come: The glory of being in Christ's resurrected presence for eternity far outweighs our light and momentary afflictions, so we do not lose heart.

Paul believes, and he speaks Christ's resurrection to us. So, we do not lose heart. Those four words I mentioned earlier? Listen to what Paul says: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (4:8-9).

How do we believe this for ourselves? Go to the Bible where Jesus speaks words of comfort and encouragement to us. Remember your baptism, when Jesus brought you into His eternal family and even now assures you of what's to come on the Last Day. Step up to the Lord's Table. Take that small piece of bread. It is the very body of Jesus. Sip the wine. It is the very blood of Christ. You are in the presence of the risen Christ at that moment. He strengthens you so you do not lose heart. Yes, what you see around you and happening to you may be so real, but what's happening inside of you because of Jesus, even though unseen, is just as real. So, we believe. We say it too. We do not lose heart.

There will come a day. There will come a day when... there will be no more broken relationships, no more faltering abilities, no more cancer, diabetes, Parkinson's, heart disease, anxiety or any ailment. **You** fill in the blank with whatever it is that weighs **you** down or your loved ones down. Because Jesus has risen from the dead, He promises that we, too, will rise. Yes, a day is coming, a day that far outweighs our light and momentary afflictions. So, Paul says to us, "We do not lose heart." Amen.