

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:6-17

A little over three years ago, Don and I remodeled our kitchen. We talked about it for a long time before we actually decided to dive in and do it. We knew it would be a huge undertaking because we planned to do most of the work ourselves.

The process began with taking measurements of the old kitchen— more than once to make sure we did it correctly. We then sat down with a designer at Lowe’s who took our ideas and needs and put them together to make a blueprint. The decisions about what kind of wood and which cupboards to purchase were difficult; there was so much to choose from, but finally the decisions were made and the order for the cupboards was placed.

Then began the really hard work began. We knew that what needed to be done would not be easy, but we couldn’t anticipate some of the challenges that arose. We tore down a wall and drywalled the spaces left in the ceiling and side wall (which was a nightmare), pulled out the old cupboards and countertops, ripped up the old flooring and sanded the remaining floor.

When the new cupboards arrived, Don got to work hanging them. He put in a new floor. After the appliances arrived, he installed them, which included marrying up new plumbing with old plumbing, which was a nightmare too. The countertops arrived, leaving us now with the cosmetic work of painting and installing backsplash tiles.

Now, we look at it in amazement, and it is wonderful. We feel a satisfaction in that we did the work; we dug deep within ourselves and rose to the challenges and overcame them; we set our sights on the goal and accomplished more than we dreamed possible. “The old is gone, the new is here.”

The Christian experience is very similar. Those who choose to follow Jesus—those whose goal is to please the Lord—experience the passing of the old and the arrival of the new, and it is wonderful. The apostle Paul wrote about this in his letter to the church in Corinth, a portion of which was read for you a few moments ago.

In verses 6-10, we hear Paul acknowledging that it is definitely not easy being a follower of Christ, especially not in this world. He knew there would be a better life, an easier life, that he would live when he would be free of his current physical body and moved on to live in the spiritual kingdom in the lifetime to come. If this sounds familiar, it is, because I pointed these things and a few things I am going to share in a few minutes last week when the sermon focused on a few verses before today’s lectionary text. Paul goes on here to acknowledge it would have been preferable for him to skip past hardships and be with his heavenly Father sooner than later. But that’s not how it was to be.

Paul endured much suffering and pain as he was imprisoned, beaten, and ridiculed. His was not an easy life; but his goal in life was not to live a comfortable private life, avoiding challenges and things that just might get him in trouble. For Paul the purpose for how he lived was not for reaching the goal of getting to heaven. Paul’s goal was to please God.

So, Paul’s words come to us as a reminder that the life that God has given each of us is a gift to be valued, respected, and honored; and therefore, should be lived as such, not just for our own benefit, but also for the benefit of others. As Christians, our ultimate goal should be to please God.

There’s a sentence in today’s scripture that, I believe, sheds light on how we know whether we are moving in the right direction towards our goal. Paul wrote, **“as long as we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord.”**

What does it mean to be “at home in the body”? Is he talking about something more than just our flesh and bones? Could it mean choosing to do only that which makes us feel good? Could it mean indulging in materialism and self-gratifying activities? Could it mean doing only that which makes us comfortable and turning a blind eye to others in need? Could it mean that we play it safe...surrounding ourselves only with others who believe as we do?

Yes, yes, yes, and yes! It does mean these things. And Paul warns us that should we make our home in living this way—these socially acceptable ways in our society—we have chosen a path that leads us away from God. The fact is that when we engage in living in a manner contrary to the priorities of God, day in and day out, without even thinking about it, and when we get really comfortable doing that, we are doing something even worse than just going through the motions of being a Christian.

Being “at home” in something means taking it to a deeper level—a more intimate spiritual level. You’ve surely heard it said that any family can live in a house, but not every house is a home. If we do an honest self-evaluation and find ourselves “at home” in these worldly preferences, then we are moving away from God; and if we are moving away from God, then, of course, we are not pleasing God.

As Christians seeking to please God, we make our home in God. It’s our faith in God that moves us into God’s home. Here we find grace that sets us free from sin. We are fed with spiritual food that gives us hope and perseverance to overcome trials and sufferings. We are wrapped in the warmth of comfort when pain and grief strike us down. The love of God is found in the fellowship and friendship of others.

When our home is in God, all of what we find there nurtures and shapes us to have Christ-like hearts. That’s important because pleasing God is not just about doing and saying all the right things. God looks at what is in our heart—what motivates what we say and do. Our hearts are shaped in God’s home by his love. It’s here then that we choose to live a life of love—Christlike love—love that is solidified in our hearts by our faith in God and not by what we see and feel in this world.

The late Archbishop Temple, when he was primate of England, once told this story. One morning, in a house where he was a guest, he heard the cook singing, “nearer, My God to Thee.” He was impressed that she was singing hymns, and he spoke of it to his host. The host replied, “Oh, yes. That’s how she boils eggs – three verses for soft boiled and five for hard.” The archbishop thought that the cook was expressing her faith. All she was doing was timing her eggs.

Unlike those around us who cannot see into our hearts and know our motivations for what we do and say, God can. So, we can’t fake it with God. We can’t use what we do and say to manipulate God into giving us brownie points for making him happy with us. God knows what is in our hearts. Our goal than should not be to get too comfortable in our skin, but instead, draw closer to the heart of God so that God’s love lives in us, and that God’s love lives through us.

Paul wants us to know that we were not given this life, and Jesus did not give his life, just for us to earn brownie points to get into heaven. There’s more to this life. If it means that we need to do some inner housecleaning so as to make sure our home is in Christ, then we should get to it now.

We can be at home with all the furnishings of God’s glorious promises—now. We don’t need to wait for the next lifetime to have everything that is of God and is good. The passing of the old and the arrival of the new begins in this lifetime when we choose to follow Jesus. But

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those who are not at home in Christ, do not know that. Where does your heart call home. Where is your home?