

**More Hungry. More Full.**  
LaGrave Christian Reformed Church  
March 27, 2022 – PM Service  
Rev. Peter Jonker  
2 Corinthians 5:1-5

People love to speculate about the afterlife. They love to daydream about what life will be like in the new creation. Will beloved pets be there? Will we still eat and drink? Will there be books? Will there be baseball? Will there be golf? Just recently I read an interesting speculation on that last question, whether or not there would be golf in heaven. “Well,” said the author, “We all know that there will be no lying, cheating or swearing in heaven, so how can there be any golf? On the other hand, we know that in the other place there will be weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth – that sounds more like a golf course to me. No, there will be no golf in heaven!”

That’s a less serious version of our heavenly daydreams. Sometimes our heavenly daydreams are much more personal and poignant. We long to see a loved one who we’ve lost. Someone very dear to you has died and you want to see them again, to embrace them, to hear their laugh. This is especially true for those of us who’ve lost children, or those of us who lost a sibling at a young age. We daydream about seeing them again and we wonder how we will see them, what it will be like to see them full grown and restored. So sometimes our heavenly daydreams are light and fun; sometimes they have more weight to them, but in both these cases they represent a way we think about heaven. It’s this sense of warm anticipation of glory. A joyful hope.

In 2 Corinthians 5 however, Paul’s heavenly reflection has a completely different tone. His heavenly reflection does not feel like a warm daydream. Listen to the spirit of Paul’s reflection. For Paul eternal life isn’t a cozy daydream, for Paul it’s more like a gnawing hunger: “For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile, we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling. Because when we are clothed we will not be found naked.” For Paul heaven is a groaning, a longing to be clothed. For Paul, heaven is a hunger burning in his heart and soul.

Paul’s not alone in thinking of heaven this way. In one of his books, Mark Buchanan talks about the hunger, the groaning, the longing in his own life. Mark is a successful pastor and author in Duncan British Columbia, a town on Vancouver Island. For those of you who don’t know, Vancouver Island is one of the most beautiful places on God’s earth. Mark talks about the beauty of the place he lives in and the richness of his earthly life: “At 41 I’m in fairly good shape. I ride my bike more than I drive. I read novels, history, theology, poetry. I listen to all sorts of music. I have meaningful and interesting work to do: preaching, teaching, counseling, writing, leading. I travel a fair amount. I like to garden. I have a beautiful family. A wife who is funny, healthy and pretty, three children who are strong, smart and growing like they ought to. I have good neighbors, the kind who swap eggs with us and take in our mail when we’re away. My life is good – as good as it gets.” “And yet,” says Buchanan, “I spend a lot of time groaning. My life is great, I should be ecstatic, and yet a lot of the times I feel restless and out of sorts. On a sunny Saturday morning when I should feel on top of the world, I feel vaguely unsatisfied, hungry.

I can identify with Mark Buchanan. I too have a life that is about as good as it gets, and in almost exactly the same terms. (Although Vancouver Island might be a tick more beautiful than Grand Rapids.) And yet I too can identify with this restlessness, this sense of dissatisfaction, this hunger that Buchanan talks about. I know what it feels like to have everything you need and more, and yet feel incomplete. I know what it’s like to stand in my living room on a sunny Saturday morning feeling inexplicably restless. And I’ll bet the same is true of many of you.

Now what’s going on here? Are we spoiled? Am I selfish? Is Mark Buchanan selfish? Do Mark Buchanan and I need to smarten up, count our blessings and get over ourselves? Or is this groaning pointing to something else?

Buchanan thinks, and Paul agrees with him, that this groaning is not merely selfishness. He calls this groaning a kind of holy speech. This groaning is the call of eternity in his heart and life. This groaning, this sense of dissatisfaction, this restlessness burning in the heart of every single person on the globe, is the pull of everlasting life, it is the call from a better country. We are restless because we feel like there should be

something more. We are restless because we know at some deep place that there is something more. That restlessness is the Holy Spirit whispering to our hearts, “You were made for something more!” In Paul’s words, we wear the best clothes life has to offer, and yet we feel naked and long to be clothed. We have the nicest home a human could ever want, and yet we feel as if we’re living in a drafty tent and missing our real home.

Of course, we human beings don’t always recognize our restlessness as a hunger for heaven. Many people have that groaning and that restlessness, but they don’t treat it as holy speech. They misdiagnose. They think they’re hungry because their house isn’t big enough, or their wife isn’t pretty enough, or their pleasures aren’t pleasurable enough, and they try to satisfy their holy hunger by buying a new house, finding new pleasures, finding a new wife. And sometimes they can distract themselves from the groaning for a little while, but only for a while, because the holy hunger always comes back. The preacher of Ecclesiastes put it this way: “I have seen the burden God has laid on people. He has set eternity in our hearts, and yet none can fathom the work of God from beginning to end.” God has put eternity in our hearts and it’s not a warm blessing; it’s a burden. A hunger.

I want to finish this sermon with three observations about this restless hunger Paul expresses in 2 Corinthians. First, it changes what you expect to feel when you follow Jesus. Sometimes we Christians talk as if we shouldn’t be restless. Sometimes we think to ourselves, “If I was a real Christian, we tell ourselves, “I wouldn’t be so discontent. I should have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart to stay! I should be happy and I know it and I should clap my hands! I should be inright, outright, downright, upright happy all the time!” There is a kernel of truth in that self-talk. There is a deep satisfaction available from Jesus that can’t be found anywhere else. There is a peace that passes understanding that belongs to those who are in Christ Jesus. There is what the catechism calls a deep rooted assurance.

But some of this sort of talk is misleading. The fact of the matter is, when we give our lives to Jesus, he might increase our holy hunger, he might sharpen our thirst. When the Spirit gets a hold of us is that *everything* is deepened: our joy and hope and peace is deeper, but so is our hunger for eternity and all things made new. When the Spirit gets ahold of us, our highs are higher and our lows are lower. When the Spirit gets a hold of us, we are both more hungry and more full.

You see that dynamic already in the Psalms. We experienced that in our liturgy earlier. You have Psalms of glorious contentment and praise – Psalm 65, Psalm 150. And you have Psalms of deep hungry lament – Psalm 44, Psalm 88. You see it in Paul too. In Philippians he talks about the peace that passes understanding. In Philippians he talks about rejoicing in the Lord always. But here he groans, and feels all the imperfections and sufferings of life in this world.

Second, this holy hunger can have an apologetic purpose. That hunger is a great evidence of the existence of God and the reality of heaven. In the movie *Sunshine*, Ralph Feinnes plays a man who grew up Jewish, but during the second world war, abandoned his belief in God. He lived as a secular man and forgot about God and his Jewish heritage. He pursued survival and worldly success. But after many years of living this way he began to have second thoughts. In one scene in the movie he comes to his Mother, who is a complete atheist, and says to her, “Mother, do you think God exists?” And she says “No, there is no God. God does not exist.” And the son thinks for a moment and then says, “Then how come we miss him so much?”

One of the best evidences that everlasting life is out there is the fact that our desire for it is so strong. As C.S. Lewis say in *Mere Christianity*: “Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well there is such a thing as water. People feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. I find in myself a desire which no experience on this earth can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” We groan says Paul, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. God has equipped humanity with built in homing devices and it is pointing toward a home that we’ve never seen.

Finally, this holy hunger drives us towards action. People talk as if too much thinking about heaven makes us passive. Religion is the opiate of the peoples, said Marx. You Christians are too heavenly minded, and no earthly good. For Paul, his vision of heaven drives him to action. “Christ’s love compels me.” Christ’s love compels him because it gives him a new way of seeing. He “no longer sees anyone from an earthly point of view,” instead he sees who people could be, who they are in Christ. And he wants them to see it too. And so it leads him to these journeys of enormous sacrifice where he shares the good news of Jesus.

What is this like? It reminds me of what it was like to go to a junk shop or a flea market with my late father in law. My father in law was handy. He built all kinds of things, but he got a special pleasure out of finding some old beat up discarded item at a junk shop and making it useful. I have been with him when he has forced the rest of the family to go out to some dusty warehouse, where his eyes have lit upon some obscure piece of wood or metal, and he will point excitedly and say, "You know what that is? That's a..." And he'll tell us its real name and its real function. Other people look and see junk, but he knows the thing's real name and its created purpose. He'll pay 5 bucks for this thing, and he'll pick it up and bring it home and clean it off and he'll make something useful out of it. So we wouldn't see the potential. We would just let it lie. But his vision causes him to act. He redeems the junk. He doesn't look at it from a regular point of view.

What my father in law does with junk, the Spirit teaches us to do with God's creation. When we look at people, no matter how broken they are, no matter how grimy, we don't see them as they are, but as they could be in Jesus Christ. When we look at our city's neighborhoods, no matter how broken they are, no matter how decrepit, we don't see those neighborhoods as they are, but as they could be in Jesus Christ. When we look at our social and political institutions, no matter how broken they are, no matter how corrupt, we don't see them as they are, but as they could be in Jesus Christ. Mother Theresa had the gift of everlasting sight. She would take care of the lepers and the beggars from the slums of Calcutta because when she looked at them she didn't see them from a worldly point of view. She looked at them and saw Jesus: "I see God in every human being. When I wash the lepers wounds I feel like I am nursing the Lord himself. Is this not a beautiful experience?"

May the Holy Spirit give us always a deep anticipation of the courts of heaven. May the Holy Spirit give us a vision of the new creation. And may that vision fill us with the peace that passes understanding that belongs to those who are in Christ Jesus. May that vision give us a deep hunger for the work of the Kingdom.

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