

*NIV84: (New International Version, 1984) This is the Bible we have been using for worship and class. It has gone out of print.*

<sup>13</sup> It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, <sup>14</sup> because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. <sup>15</sup> All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

*NIV: (New International Version) This is the 2011 version of the Bible we have been using. The publishers simply call it the NIV.*

<sup>13</sup> It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, <sup>14</sup> because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. <sup>15</sup> All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

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### **Fix Your Eyes on What You Can't See**

Have you ever been to the top of the Sears Tower in Chicago? It's one of the tallest buildings in the world and you can see for miles. When you look out over Lake Michigan, there's a map that says that on a clear day you can see the Michigan shoreline seventy or eighty miles away. Well, when we took our kids there, I tried. I looked as hard as I could. But I couldn't see the shoreline. It wasn't clear enough that day. Last week, after school my youngest son wanted to know if his mom was home. I told him to look out the window in my office and see if her car was in the driveway. He looked, but he couldn't tell. The hedge is too thick to see. What do both of those situations have in common? Not being able to see something that is real. In both cases, if you moved to a different place, you could see what you were looking for. To see into my driveway, it would only be a matter of a few feet. To see the Michigan shoreline would've required much greater movement – miles probably – but it was possible. But what if, in both cases, I told my kids to keep looking until they could see what could not be seen from where they were standing? Without a doubt, they would've become frustrated. It would've been a complete waste of effort. Yet, today St. Paul tells us to do just that. My friends, **fix your eyes on what you can't see.**

#### **I.**

**That's what our ministry is all about.** Of course, St. Paul isn't talking about shorelines or driveways. He's talking about Christ and eternal life. He quotes Psalm 116 which says, "**I believed; therefore I have spoken.**" The writer of the psalm was not talking about sharing our faith with other people. He was talking about prayer in times of hurt and distress. He believed, and so he prayed to God about all the agonies of his life. Paul quotes that statement and then says, "**Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak.**"

Who is the "we"? It's ministers – pastors and teachers, called by God to serve his people. In this chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul is talking about how weak and frail and helpless we ministers are. The Church on earth – indeed you, here at Peace – would be in a world of hurt if your getting to heaven depended on how faithful and good and insightful I am and our teachers are, because we're all sinners. But it's not up to us to get you to heaven. It's up to Christ to get you there. Because we trust in him and the promises that he attaches to his Word, we speak no matter how weak and inept we feel.

What promises could cause guys like me to stand up here every week and try to come up with something worthwhile to say to you? What promises could drive our teachers to spend years preparing to teach other people's children, and get paid much less than a public school teacher would for doing the same job? Paul says, **“because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.”** The heart of all of God's promises is Easter. Today is the last Sunday of the Easter season, and God directs our attention one more time back to the empty tomb of Christ and all that it promises us for this life and for the life to come.

He points us to Jesus' resurrection because death rules this life. That's the basic reason why we gather here. Many times in my ministry I've been with families when someone they loved died or right after that person died, while the family was still at the hospital. Always, the hospital gives the family time with the body of the person they've lost. Does that seem horrible to you? I could understand if the idea of being in the same room with a loved one's body would bother you. But you know what? Most people who are in that situation actually appreciate it. Not just for a last goodbye, but because it makes it easier for them to accept that their loved one really has gone. And we need that because death is so final. We have to go on living, perhaps for decades, without that person in our lives. We have to come to terms with the fact that we won't get to talk to them or laugh with them or make up with them ever again.

Death is unchangeable for us. That's why we don't like to think too much about our own death. St. Paul's world didn't have that luxury. Without modern medical and farming and manufacturing technology, life was brief for many people. Things that we shrug off killed people then. They had to face their mortality. We all will face that mortality too. If Christ doesn't come back first, every one of us is going to die. But the resurrection of Christ promises that death is not the end. No matter how final death feels, it will not last for us, because God raised Jesus and God will raise us and we will stand with Jesus on the last day.

That's something that we can't see yet, from our position here in this sinful world. Death we see. But eternal life will remain hidden from us until we change our position and stand with Jesus on Judgment Day. Yet, we do fix our eyes on what Jesus promises. It's like we are standing on that top floor of the Sears Tower and I do keep telling my kids, “Look for that shore!” Not the Michigan lakeshore, the shore of heaven. Keep looking. It's out there even if we can't see it yet. Keep fixing your eyes and your hearts on heaven.

That's what Peace Lutheran Church is all about. That's why we operate a school and a preschool and why we're a part of the Huron Valley Lutheran High School Conference of Congregations. It's why we're a part of a synod that runs four different ministry training schools and sends missionaries to work all across the United States and in 24 countries around the world. We believe, therefore we speak. We speak so that you our members, children and adults, will believe and therefore speak in prayer and in teaching and in witness.

God blesses every speaking of his word whether I'm the one speaking it or you are. Paul says that all our believing and speaking result in grace reaching more and more people who then pour their thanksgiving out and give glory to God. He means that the people of God praise him. In other words, you speak because you believe, just like we pastors and teachers do. And we've already seen that this morning. The preschoolers lifted up their voices and prayed to Jesus to draw us to him. At the end of our service, the kindergarteners through the seventh grade will praise God for all that he has taught us this year. At the HVL graduation this afternoon, the students will praise God. They will speak because they believe. The faith in their hearts will overflow from their lips.

## II.

Ministry is all about fixing the eyes of the people of God on what we can't see physically, but what their faith knows is out there. That always overflows with praise to God. That matters, day by day, as we struggle to do the work God has assigned us here at Peace. My friends, **fix your eyes on what you can't see. That's what keeps our ministry going.**

I don't want to paint an unrealistic picture: if we just preach the word, everything will be sweetness and light. Some people seem to have that idea. They think that because this is a church, nobody would ever do or say anything that would hurt another person's feelings. Sadly, that's not true about any church on earth. Yes, we are supposed to be different from the world. But we are still sinners. Sometimes, students and parents are deeply disappointed in Lutheran schools. They think that the kids there should never be mean or hurt one another's feelings, never say or do anything that would require discipline. They think that parents should always be models of Christian parenting. Of course, those things should be true. But if the kids and parents

didn't have sinful hearts, they wouldn't need our schools. We don't mean to imply that once we've taught them the truth, they're never going to sin again. Of course they are. Of course all of us here are going to sin again. If you weren't a sinner, you wouldn't need guys like me.

But ministry to sinners can be difficult. It can even be heartbreaking at times. We don't always see God's people praising God, especially when we remember that praise includes our lives. We praise and give glory to God by what we say. But we also praise and give glory to him by what we do. And sometimes, we praise and give glory to the devil by what we say and do. And when that happens, it's hard on a congregation and troubles her ministers. Of course, pastors, teachers and members all share in the hurts and sorrows of our brothers and sisters in Christ. You know what I'm talking about – we hear that someone we love in Christ is in the hospital, and it saddens us. We hear that some terrible loss has struck a member of our church, and we wish that people didn't have to go through those kinds of things. But in this life we all do. In this life, we sinners struggle to live our faith and we struggle with the effects of sin on our lives, the hurts and sorrows that never stop tormenting us.

But Paul says, **“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”** He's talking about pastors and teachers but what he says isn't just true for them. It's true for all Christians everywhere. We don't lose heart. We don't have to let the horrors of life in a sinful world crush our faith. Even when we see people we love turn their backs on Christ and that causes us enormous pain, we don't have to give up. Why not? Because God's promises still apply to us. That resurrection of Christ means that God is going to get us through the worst that we have to face here. He's going to give us the strength we need to bear up under the cross and reach heaven. So outwardly, we can waste away. Our bodies are all aging and after a certain point in life, we can't mistake the fact that we will die one day. The effort of being faithful can take a physical toll on us. Sickness, stress, sadness can break our health.

But inwardly, we are being renewed every day. Every time we hear about Jesus, God renews us. Every time we come here and God says that Jesus did die and he did rise and you will live with him, he makes the believer in us young and vital again. He undoes the weariness and the damage of sin in our hearts and he draws us closer to him. Now, we will need that day by day for as long as we are here. But God gives it to us. How? By focusing us on what we can't see. Paul says that our light and momentary troubles are achieving an eternal glory that outweighs them all. All our hearts drive us to Jesus for the cure. Clinging to him in faith when all the world and all our pain deny him, brings us at last to heaven. You know what? When we get there, we're going to say it was worth it. It was worth every tear. It was worth every hurt and heartbreak we had to suffer on the way.

**“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”** We fix our eyes on what we can't see because that's the only thing that really lasts. Heaven is the only thing that will survive the end of the world. When our bodies die, our souls will live until Jesus raises these bodies and puts soul and body back together again. So yes, this life hurts, even with the comfort of the ministry. But the hurt is temporary. It will end when we stand with Jesus. The joy we will have then will never end.

So fix your eyes on that joy, even though you can't see it. Today, is our annual school graduation. We've spent the last year fixing the eyes of these kids on things they can't see physically. And they have seen them with the eyes of faith. For as long as this congregation has existed, God has used the ministry here to encourage you to keep looking for that eternal life that you can't see yet. And he promises that the day is coming when you will see it. You will no longer be standing in this world where sin makes it all seem so far away that we could never reach it. You will be standing next to Jesus. There you will see all that he has in store for you. Until that day comes, keep looking for him. Amen.