A Sermon for DaySpring

By Madi Harner

*“Living the Good News”*

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

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I don’t know how many hockey fans we have here; if you’re not, don’t worry, I was with you about a year ago. That was, before Las Vegas got their first ever pro league anything and it happened to be hockey. I knew very little about hockey before this year, other than seeing guys play at the ice rink I went to growing up. However, when your hometown gets their first national sports team, you automatically become a fan. And

to raise the intensity of this fandom, their first home game was nine days after the shooting at the Route 91 festival. The way the city and team rallied together was a force to be reckoned with.

If you’ve ever seen a Stanley Cup finals game before this year, you will know that it’s just the beginning of another game. However, if you’ve seen the first few minutes in the beginning of a Las Vegas Golden Knights game, you would know they put on a show. The first time I saw this I thought it was pretty cool. I just assumed this was a hockey thing. Put on a show, especially before a playoff game. Buuuut no. Apparently this is only a Las Vegas tradition -- lights, flaming arrows, projections on the ice -- might as well be a mini cirque de sole preview. You know what, it doesn’t surprise me one bit. It’s Vegas after all.

So my question today is, just as I wasn’t surprised about this showy pregame intro for my hometown hockey team because it screams Las Vegas to our core, are we living our ordinary, everyday lives, in a way that reflects the resurrected Jesus living inside of us? Would people recognize us by what we proclaim to believe? Paul wants to point us in that direction.

**Because we know the One who raised Jesus, we are free to proclaim the Good News.**

Think about it. If we run into our favorite TV personality, chef, author, you name it, AND we happen to get a picture with them, it goes up on social media in seconds. How much more does knowing the Creator of the universe propel us into claiming this Good News?

**We are free to proclaim the Good News, no matter what our calling may be**.

Paul continues in his letter to the Corinthians, after just having told them that the life of Jesus is to be made visible in their mortal bodies, to say that it is in this same spirit, the one that is in accordance with Scripture, the truth that we believe, that gives us authority to speak. This comment that Paul makes “I believed, and so I spoke” comes from a collection in the Psalms called the Hallel, meaning praise. He’s encouraging us to stand firm in our faith and that our faith in the Gospel ultimately demands its proclamation. Paul, if I dare say, is calling all of us out with this reminder.

As some of you may know, I am just finishing my second year at Truett, and if you would have told me three years ago this is what I would be doing on a hot summer day in June, I would have laughed at you. And for those of you who know me well, you know that this laugh would have been very loud! You see, I came to Truett only first having to reshape what I thought my calling was -- which at the time was to be a youth pastor’s wife or a marriage and family counselor, but that’s a story for another day. I knew I was going to need a Master’s in something with the degree plan I was taking and though I loved the Church as an institution I didn’t realize that God could possibly be calling me solely in that direction. What God is calling me to is a continual journey and each of our journeys has unique characteristics, but no matter the differences in all of our calls, all of us are called to proclaim the Good News that we believe. Paul tells us that because we believe, we speak. So in what areas of our lives are we living out this call to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, that we trust in the One who raised him, and that we too will walk with him in the holy presence?

Our callings in this life may not be set in stone. Some of our callings may be permanent, some may be fluid, some may change from season to season, but in all that we do, because we believe, we too speak.

And Paul tells us why! When we speak, we have the power through the Holy Spirit to extend grace to all we encounter and that when grace is extended, thanksgiving bubbles forth and brings glory to God. That’s what this faith is all about, extending the freely given grace that was bestowed on us, to all. And when we do this, I imagine it will shift our focus from ourselves, our wants, our needs, to those of others and that’s what brings thanksgiving and glory to God, to see sons and daughters loving one another and extending grace.

The psalmists time and time again remind us that the God who calls us is also the God who hears us, as it is said in Psalm 116: For I have kept the faith, even when I said “I was greatly afflicted.”

**So, not only are we free to proclaim this Good News no matter what our call, we are free to proclaim the Good News no matter our current circumstance.**

*Everybody Always* is a book written by Bob Goff who also wrote *Love Does*, and he loves in such a way that I only strive to resemble. Bob is full of energy, lover of adventure and all things spontaneous. For those wondering, he’s a 7 on the enneagram, and to me that describes some of his extravagant stories that you think only exist in fables and fairy tales. The ones I want to live. One day Bob was asked this question, “How is your life working for the people around you?” Because if our life isn’t working for the people around us, is it really working for us?

Bob tells a story about a children’s book he read and it was all about buckets. The point he said was really simple: we will become in our lives what we put into our buckets. Bob said he immediately knew what he needed to put into his, which was patience. And he actually put this to the test. He went to the hardware store, bought himself an aluminum bucket and carried it around with him looking like a dairy farmer. He used it as a reminder to fill his life with patience. Sure, people asked him a million questions, but he says if we fill our buckets with business deals, we turn into business people. If we fill them with a critical spirit, we become cynics. But IF we fill our buckets with love, we might just actually become love.

Paul tells us not to lose heart. That though we face momentary afflictions, we have a spirit that is being renewed day by day. There are days where I do not want to fill my bucket with love. I am sure there are days that Paul, knowing what the Corinthians were up to and how they were treating one another, did not want to fill his bucket up with love either. When he got word from Titus that there were false prophets amongst them and he had to defend himself, being tired and his body taking physical grievances, I can imagine filling his bucket with love might not have been the first thing that popped into his mind. I’ve been suffering from severe allergies for about three weeks now, thanks to the summer grasses, and it’s just hard to do things when your body isn’t working right. When you’re tired from work all day, kids are running around, you’re sick and then you have to take care of another sick human, people have to eat, laundry has to get done (just don’t look at my floor this week), trust me, I have a million excuses when my body seems to be failing me. But if I only focus on the reasons why my physical body is failing me, I can miss out on the daily renewal of spirit that can take place. Paul recognizes this.

Now our struggles aren’t all just diminished when we put this into an eternal sense, but Paul does say that we know the One who raised the savior from dead to life. It’s this resurrection life here on earth that we get to participate in when our inner natures are being renewed day by day. When we pick up our buckets and whatever we’re used to filling them with we leave at home and start filling them with love, despite the attacks on our physical bodies, we’re renewed. Each and every day. For this, we will give thanks to the Lord with our whole hearts, for though we walk in the midst of trouble, our God sees us, our God hears us, our God saves us, and our God’s love endures forever. This covenantal, unconditional love has been there from the beginning of time, and it is this same love that takes us through to the journey of the Cross and the resurrected life of Jesus.

So again I ask the question, are we living our ordinary, everyday lives, in a way that reflects the resurrected Jesus living inside of us? Even when our circumstances feel as though it is impossible, we remember that we know the one who raised Jesus, and we are free to proclaim the Good News.

**And no matter our current circumstance, we have been tasked to focus on the unseen in such a way that proclaims the Good News.**

It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood, a beautiful day for a neighbor… I am sure that you all know exactly who said this and for the children in the room, Daniel Tiger was not the first to say it! Mister Fred Rogers was asked to be the commencement speaker at Middlebury College it 2001. He started his speech to the group of graduating seniors by singing this iconic tune with them. Fred says that he often wondered why he felt like bowing to those who showed him appreciation for the work that he was doing and he soon came to realize that those of us who bow are probably, whether we know it or not, acknowledging the presence of the eternal in our neighbor. He goes on to say what is printed on your worship guide. “I believe that appreciation is a holy thing, that when we look for what’s best in the person we happen to be with at the moment, we’re doing what God does; so in appreciating our neighbor, we’re participating in something truly sacred.”

Paul is pulling us into this resurrection life, this idea that we are to be people of faith that doesn’t focus on what can be seen, for all that can be seen is temporary. We can fill our buckets with things that can be seen like donuts, money, cellphones, but if we fill our buckets with these things, they will either be eaten, spent, or the battery will eventually die and becomes rather useless. But if we fill our buckets with the things that are unseen like love and grace, we can continue to pass out this love, that is not tangible in a real sense, but it’s rather to be focused on in light of the resurrection that we get to participate in among the here and now. In the already, but the not yet. When we see the eternal in one another, we are building up the Kingdom of God here on earth. In Mark, Jesus asks, “Who is my mother, and who is my brother?” Whoever does the will of God, whoever sees the eternal in one another, not what they wear, who they associate with, the car they drive, the job they hold, but who sees the eternal in one another, they are our family. And when we don’t see the eternal in one another, when we don’t extend love and grace, this is when we have divided kingdoms and when we deny the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

It even comes down to our earthly tents. These spaces in which we live, our bodies, our homes, our churches, even our cities and nations, these are all temporal. Including our social spheres, the places we have influence, our surrounding cultures, none of it is everlasting. But because we know the One in whom our belief rests, the One who raised Jesus from dead to life, this One is creating an eternal home that is not made of temporary things with human hands, but by the power of the Holy Spirit is creating within us a spacious and expansive room overflowing with love and grace. So when we see the eternal in one another, we truly are participating in something sacred.

We continue to hear story after story of those who don’t feel or see their worth in the temporal home we’ve been gifted. We all struggle in one way or another to find our place in this world and there are a million competing voices to proclaim who it is that we should be, what we should look like, or how to act in a certain situation. But Paul tells us that no matter what our circumstances, we are continually tasked to focus on the things that are unseen, because the things that are unseen are meant for eternal glory with and for God and we find our thanksgiving in the proclamation of the One who raised Jesus.

Who has God placed in your life to see the Divine Image in? The colleague in the office down the hall? The cashier at HEB? The operator of the car in front of you? So because of this belief and the freedom to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in all that we are called to be, no matter our circumstances, I can’t help but think that Paul and Mr. Rogers would agree. When we focus on what is unseen, we are participating in the divine dance with the eternal. When we focus on the unseen we are able to extend grace to others, and when we focus on the unseen we bring glory to God and we therefore live into the resurrected life of Jesus.

Let it be so. Amen.

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