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Abington Presbyterian Church

June 6, 2021

Psalm 138

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

### DAILY RENEWAL

We are into June – hooray for summer! It is a time when many of us take a break from whatever is considered the daily grind. Lots of people were not able to travel last year because of the pandemic, so that yearning for a change of pace that might lead to a sense of renewal is a significant felt need. I am all for summer vacations. But there is also a human need for more frequent, even daily renewal. Each night, we crawl into bed hoping for a good night's rest so we can wake up physically and mentally refreshed, ready for a new day. Of course, we need physical sustenance as well, so we have the energy to meet the challenges of the day. Yet what the Apostle Paul writes about to the church in Corinth goes beyond what a good night's sleep or a good meal can offer. He describes his understanding that even as our physical bodies change during the aging process, as we grow physically weaker over time, what he calls our outer nature is wasting away, yet there is the prospect for our inner nature to be renewed day by day. How do we avail ourselves of the gift from God of daily renewal?

Ten days ago, I was thankful to finally be able to bury my father's remains at a cemetery near where he grew up in Texas. After a brief illness, soon after his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday, he died on Palm Sunday of last year. On a day we celebrated our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, by God's grace, my dad made his own triumphal entry into the New Jerusalem. His physical decline those last weeks of his life was obvious, but he was sustained by his faith that provided resurrection hope that the same One who raised our Lord Jesus from the dead would raise him as well.

In our passage from 2 Corinthians, resurrection hope is tied to the prospect of daily renewal. Such a liberating hope impacts us with a renewing capacity. Today is the 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the largest seaborne invasion in history, involving land, sea, and air forces. It came to be referred to as D-Day, June 6, 1944, when Allied forces landed in Normandy, France, to help liberate Europe from German forces and turn the course of World War II. News that the Allied forces were on their way actually

reached a group of Allied soldiers who earlier had been captured and were being held in a German prisoner of war camp. They had gotten access to some electronic parts and had managed to put together a crude radio to pick up news of what was going on beyond their POW camp. They were able to hear about the troops establishing a beachhead, with the prospect that they could advance from there. There was a lot of excited chatter among the prisoners of war that night. Yet, when they got up the next morning, where they were located, deep inside Germany, things still looked the same. Their daily lives still consisted of meager rations and that same old barbed wire fence restricted their movement. The German guards who treated them harshly were still there. Everything looked the same, and yet, nothing was the same because of the renewing hope that lived within them. That kind of hope, for us a resurrection hope, can bring renewal to our daily lives. <sup>1</sup>

Our daily lives are not as daunting as life was for those prisoners of war, but there are factors that can block our way to daily renewal. If we are filled with anger, fear, bitterness, or jealousy, we may need to offload such things in order to make room for what can bring us the renewal God desires for us. On our spiritual journey through life, every moment is a movement away from something and towards something else. As we adjust the focus for our lives in keeping with the intent of the One who gave us life in the first place, we open our hearts to do what our psalm for today suggests, which is giving thanks to God with our whole hearts for the blessings we see around and within us. Such an attitude and devotional practice of gratitude is a constant reminder of what all God has been doing for us, which can become a source of hope when we face significant challenges ahead. A life filled with gratitude rejuvenates not just our relationship with God, but also with others who have their needs as well, so we can expand our life's focus beyond the triple small package of me, myself, and I. A daily focus on some reason for which to be grateful, puts us in touch with a larger picture of what is going on in God's reign. It enables us to feel a part of something and Someone much greater than ourselves. Such an expansiveness opens us up to encounter more of what our psalm for today indicates is God's way of reaching out to us, a way full of steadfast love and faithfulness. Awareness of and encounters with such divine love and faithfulness has great capacity to renew us day by day, regardless of what we are facing.

The prospect to be filled with hope, faith, and love that God gives us is what can enable the daily renewal we need and that God graciously wants for us. The great theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, recognized our human limitations, physical and otherwise, but offered in his book, The Irony of American History, the following:

“Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we must be saved by love.”<sup>2</sup>

These are the same three gifts of God to which scripture guides us: hope, faith, and love. As we wholeheartedly open ourselves to these divine gifts with gratitude, we will encounter God’s renewing spirit working within us and through us. As we move toward being more receptive of these gifts, we will come to recognize that the same Spirit who raised our Lord Jesus from the dead is at work within us. The steadfast love which God offers isn’t limited like we are, so it endures forever. The faithfulness of the One who graciously gives us what we need never comes up short. We can then begin to understand with joy what Paul asserted when he said: “So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.” We are being renewed! Thanks be unto God. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> From a story shared by Dr. Wellford Hobbie in a sermon at River Road Presbyterian Church, Richmond, VA on April 22, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, The Irony of American History, University of Chicago Press; Reprint edition, 2008.