

This is the Day...for a Gut-Check

5th Sun. after Pent. – 06/23/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 13, [Paul speaks to the believers in Corinth (and here today in Ft. Lupton) and says (literally from the Greek), **“In response – I am speaking as to children, have your hearts opened wide.”**”

Introduction

✘ There once was a new church plant in a community filled with proud, busy, intellectual go-getters. The pastor or missionary – whichever you want to call him, had a rocky start during the first 18 months of his time there. After the missionary had to leave for a time, the members became divided in their loyalty toward the remaining leaders, even forming cliques within the church. It didn't help when one particular member got involved in a sex scandal and people were compelled to take sides. Things got to the point that their worship was no longer orderly and confusion abounded over the most basic Christian beliefs, including the resurrection of Jesus.

→ When the original pastor came back for a visit, it was painful to see how conflicted things had become which led to an even more painful letter from that pastor calling attention to all of the ungodly division and unfaithful beliefs and attitudes within what was supposed to be a church worshipping and following Christ. They were hanging on by a thread – discouraged and in need of direction when a second letter arrived from their pastor. This letter brought them much needed comfort and good news, starting out by saying, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction” (2 Cor. 1:3–4).

I. In danger of wasting God's grace.

✘ That letter is where we find our Bible text for this message today; what we know of as 2 Corinthians. And the church planter or pastor who wrote it was the apostle Paul. This Christian Church in Corinth had been through a lot when they received this letter from Paul. The relationship between Paul and this church that he had planted under the Holy Spirit's guidance, certainly had its share of conflict.

→ Here in our Epistle Reading today from 2 Corinthians six, Paul pleads in verse one with the Corinthian Christians not to “receive the grace of God in vain”. This phrase “in vain” is only used by Paul in the New Testament. The Greek word, “kenon” (κενὸν) describes something that is “empty, hollow” or “wasted” like water that is just running to waste.

✘ Just before this text Paul reminds us that God has undeservedly, yet lovingly reconciled us back to Himself through Jesus – when He took our sin and then in exchange gave us His righteousness on the cross. God has done all of the work to save us from the wrath we deserve. Salvation is there for all of us, as a free gift.

→ And Paul tells the Corinthians along with us Fort Luptians today that Jesus has given not only Paul and the other apostles, but every member of the Church of Jesus Christ the ministry of reconciliation; the honor; the role of being “ambassadors” for Christ here in this unbelieving world where we live.

✘ But there's a problem. Paul is concerned that the people in Christ's Church are not receiving this awesome gift of salvation and ministry as God intends; that it's like water just running through a hollow log; that their hearts and souls are not retaining God's grace to their benefit; so that they will share it with others as well.

→ He's concerned in verse 12 that the Corinthian's hearts have been "restricted by their own affections", he says. This word translated as "affections" is an interesting word in the original Greek that Paul was writing in. The word is "splanknon" (σπλάγγνον) and it's used to refer to a person's internal abdominal organs like the stomach, liver, heart and gut. In Paul's day, the Greek world believed that the "splanknon" – that was where a person's feelings came from.

→ So Paul tells the people here that he and the other apostles have been "wide open" in their hearts; they've been vulnerable; willing to suffer hardship and slander; honest and transparent with the people about God's truth and about God's work for their salvation. He says, "You are not restricted by us". In other words we've given you everything God has charged us to give to you, for your salvation; for you to live as faithful believers of Christ in this sin-filled world; for you to be Jesus-proclaimers and servants to others in Jesus' love.

→ But "you all; you Corinthian believers are restricting...limiting yourselves as believers by "your own splanknon"; by your own gut; your own feelings!

✘ Friends, this is an important word of warning for every one of us here today. Is the only thing "restricting" or keeping you from the fullest and greatest relationship possible with Jesus your own inner self; your gut feelings and affections and desires?

→ When Jesus says, "Take up your cross and follow Me" (Mt. 16:24), or "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5:44), or when Paul says you are to forgive "one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32), but your self-centered, earthly oriented, feelings driven, untrusting and maybe even unbelieving "gut" comes up with all kinds of excuses and reasons why you'd rather not respond according to God's will – that's when you and I are struggling with a dangerous spiritual heart disease; when we are in need of a serious "gut-check".

II. A serious "gut-check"

✘ If we are honest with ourselves, each one of us can relate to this problem the Corinthians had, can't we? Yes, there are times that our hearts have been closed off to others; times when we've seen someone in some kind of need and we've intentionally looked the other way or avoided contact; times that we supposedly forgot to do some task we know is ours to do, forcing someone else to pick up our slack; times we just don't feel like being a loving, caring, helpful, honest believer in Christ. This is the day that it's time for a gut-check.

→ Yet there are reasons that our hearts might actually be damaged. Sometimes it's when damage was done to us; like when you've been hurt deeply by someone you love and you find it hard to trust anyone at all. Or perhaps a dear friend or family member has died and you just can't understand why God would allow such a thing to happen. Maybe you've been enduring hurt from a conflict between you and another believer that you've held silently within your gut for far too long.

→ Whatever the case may be, whatever the pain and suffering we have right now, or have had in the past, each and every one of us – myself included...our heart; our gut is not in perfect health here in this sin-infected life. Like the Corinthians, our guts are restricted. They aren't as open as God has designed or desires them to be toward Him and toward our fellow man.

III. The Grace of Jesus is here today.

✘ But here's the great news from God to you today: just as Paul told the Corinthians, so I am telling each of you here and now, "You are not left alone to deal with your spiritual heart disease."

→ Paul reminds us in verse two here of God's eternal promise in Isaiah 49:8 "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Then Paul applies that promise

directly into the faith-filled heart of every person reading or listening to his letter, “Now...now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

- ✘ You see what that means dear friends and fellow believers in Christ? You no longer have to carry around all of those spiritual and emotional and sin-soaked burdens. All of that sin, guilt, shame you’ve brought upon yourself; all of the hurt and wrong that’s been done to you – it no longer needs to twist or restrict or sour your heart and gut.

→ Jesus has done the miraculous, life-altering work to repair and rejuvenate the health of your heart. David cried out to the Lord in midst of his own gut-check, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). And as Paul told us last Sunday a few verses before this text, in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

→ Jesus has done it all! You and I are entirely new creations. In His gracious death and resurrection, He has created a new heart within us. Our guts; our feelings and attitudes and consciences – are now washed clean in the waters of baptism because of Jesus; because of His unrestrained grace!

IV. The Wide Open Heart of Jesus.

- ✘ You see, there is no way that you or I or any human being can open up and unbind our guts on our own. And Paul shows us in verse 13 that this is the case when he says, according to original Greek, “have your hearts opened wide.” Paul uses a passive verb there that means we aren’t the ones doing the work, but instead the work is being done to us; for us and within us. For some reason most English translations don’t make this distinction clear.

→ But Paul even clarifies that he’s speaking to us as children; as our loving heavenly Father speaks to, supports and aids his children in accomplishing what we need more than anything else, “have your hearts opened wide” in full submission and faith toward Jesus and watch Him do His mighty work of grace inside of you.

- ✘ That work goes all the way back to when Jesus first opened His arms, His heart, His entire being and came down from the heavens to take our human flesh upon Himself. And then as the sinless Son of God, Jesus opened His gut to take our sin into His flesh so that He could then open His arms wide on the cross and die for every one of your sins and mine.

→ He endured our suffering; our spiritual heart disease so that He could then forgive us fully and cleanse our hearts, minds and souls for all eternity.

- ✘ So brothers and sisters, as Paul says, “Now Is the Day of Salvation” when Jesus opens us wide and cleanses our gut!

→ There’s no waiting; no hoop to jump through to earn it or deserve it. It’s all God’s gift of grace...today! This is the day you will receive Christ’s body and blood here in His Supper for forgiveness, life, and salvation. This very day your sins have been absolved in the name of the Father and the ✠ Son and the Holy Spirit. Here today you are receiving God’s favor as you hear His Word of Good News proclaimed to you.

Conclusion

- ✘ Sure, we will still suffer here on earth. Even as God’s people, we’ll still endure difficulties just as Paul says he did; things like hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger, dishonor, and slander.

→ We can’t entirely avoid the discomfort of conflict, the misery of broken relationships, or the agony of grief, but these imperfect hearts; these problems of the gut...they will not last forever, because we do not receive the grace of God in vain.

✘ No, in His gift of faith, we receive His grace in all of its unrestrained fullness. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, we, too, will rise from our graves when He returns on the Last Day. And on that glorious Day our hearts will be opened wide to the fullest, and all restrictions will be wiped away and we will be filled with the grace and glory of our Lord Jesus. Amen.