

“Your House is Not Empty”

2 Cor. 4:13-5:1

If I ask you, “How do you know you are in God’s House?” how would you answer? Your answer really depends on what I mean by God’s House. We call this building God’s House – and rightly so. The place where the people of God gather for worship has historically been referred to as God’s House. Psalm 122 begins, “I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.”

However, when we read Paul’s letter to the Corinthians or hear Jesus’ speak about a “house,” these words are not referring to anything made of wood or stone. Paul says, “For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with human hands, eternal in the heavens.”

Your body is a tent, a tabernacle, a temporary dwelling place. This tent will be destroyed. There is an eternal building from God in your future. The resurrection of the body and life everlasting – eternal life in that resurrected body is the goal. Nothing else matters. As Paul says, “Our outer nature is wasting away . . . everything that you see is transient (temporary).” It won’t last.

But what the Bible says about the spiritual aspects of this dwelling place, this body, this tent, this house is not all about our eternal

resurrected bodies in the future. God's Word, the words of Jesus speak to us here and now. And in Mark's Gospel, Jesus talks about your body being a house.

The Bible speaks of three spiritual options for the house of your body. The first option is for you to remain all by yourself. Remain an empty house. "I and I alone own this body." Paul says in Galatians 5, those who are ruled by the flesh have "the desires of the flesh [which] are against the Spirit . . . The works of the flesh are evident [and he gives a whole list of what those works are]. . . [and] those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" Gal. 5:16-26. That being the case, thankfully, you are not an empty house. Empty houses do not inherit the kingdom of God.

Being an empty house is not the best option, because, as Jesus says in Lk.11:24-26, without the Spirit of God dwelling in you, your body is an empty house in which an evil spirit may come and inhabit and decide to stay. And, by the way, this remains a major problem in the world today. The pastors of the Lutheran Church of Madagascar (which is bigger than the LCMS) deal with this all the time because inviting spirits into your body is standard practice among the pagans of that country. I personally know two pastors who have dealt with this here in America. Our "sophisticated" society doesn't want to consider this, but it is real. It is dangerous to be an empty house.

The best option, and really the only good option, is for your body to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. So long as the Holy Spirit is dwelling within you, you have no reason to fear any other spirit

entering your house. No demon, not even Satan himself can reach into you and pull the Holy Spirit out. There is no room for him when the Holy Spirit is in your house.

However, as Jesus says in our Gospel reading, Satan, the strong man in the parable, can be bound up by someone even stronger. Satan cannot reach into you and tear out your faith. He is not stronger than God. He can deceive it out of you. We see with Adam and Eve how well he twists God's words and asks, "Did God really say?"

This brings us to another question. How do I know that the Holy Spirit is in me and I am not an empty house? What if I don't feel very "full of the Spirit" today? What does Peter say, "Baptism now saves you."

Don't put your confidence in yourself; in how you feel today; in how you feel any day. Because how you feel is going to change from day to day. We have one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all who does not change from day to day. And the grace of God has come to you from outside of you.

The Word of God joined with that water hits you in the face and Baptism now saves you. Have confidence in your Baptism. As Paul says, "Faith comes by hearing" the external Word of God. Have confidence in the Word of God. This is where He has chosen to speak to you.

When doubts creep in; when your house doesn't feel very full, say

to yourself, say to anyone who will listen, “I believe and I am baptized.” Your house is not empty – even when you are not feeling very full of the Spirit.

This Sunday is very special in the life of our church as eight of our youth will receive the body and blood of Christ for the first time. Have confidence in Christ and His Word: “This is My body given for you; this is My blood shed for the forgiveness of your sins.” As I said before, every good thing that you have inside of you, in your house, has come from outside of you. On your own, you are just an empty house. God has chosen you to be the place where He dwells.

Luther asks in his Small Catechism, “What should you do if you have no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament? Luther says, “Touch yourself and make sure you still have a body,” because if you do, then you need the forgiveness of sin.

Then, you need to look around and make sure you are still in this world, because if you are, then there will be no lack of sin or trouble. You will need to be filled with Christ. And finally, remember that the devil is still all around and wants nothing more than for you to be an empty house.

Have confidence in your Baptism. Have confidence in the words of the Absolution. Have confidence in the God-breathed Word of Scripture. Have confidence in the body and blood of Christ broken and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Have confidence that when this tent, our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with human hands, eternal in the heavens. Amen.