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 Memorial Garden and Walkway Dedication

Don't Lose Heart
2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

*¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus **will raise us also** with Jesus, and will **bring us with you into his presence.** ¹⁵ Yes, everything is for your sake, so that **grace, as it extends to more and more people,** may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.*

*¹⁶ **So we do not lose heart.** Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our **inner nature is being renewed** day by day. ¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an **eternal weight of glory** beyond all measure, ¹⁸ because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what **cannot be seen is eternal.***

*5 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, **eternal in the heavens.***

You know what I'm reminded of in our Memorial Garden?

When I was in 8th grade,

my beloved **Grandpa Bill died** after a long battle with cancer.

It was Easter morning, and we were staying with relatives.

I will never forget it because that morning I woke up **startled**,

with the strangest feeling that something had happened to Grandpa.

It was only later in the day that I learned that at the same time I woke up startled with that strange feeling,

my beloved Grandpa **had passed** from this life to his eternal one.

My Grandpa Bill was part of a Presbyterian church,

and he was the one who made me **feel at home in church.**

He cleaned the church, and let me run around it while he did so.

That was my first time in the pulpit!

Grandpa took me to funerals, to church services, to potlucks,

he helped me see that church was family,

and God's family was a place of welcome.

We had a **very real spiritual connection.**

So I guess it's no surprise that I experienced this at his death.

My strange feeling was replaced by a **powerful peace**—

a sense that he was safe with God, finally whole, finally free.
It was a gift.

Have you ever had an experience like that?
A powerful feeling about someone you love?

I remember a ***prayer time during a power walk*** many years ago,
while I was visiting a dear friend on the Carolina coast.
God put on my heart a verse of scripture from ***Hebrews 4: 14-16***:
*let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, that we may find
mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.*

I was encouraged in this prayer time ***to come boldly to God*** with my greatest
needs, despite the fact that I felt like life was going pretty well.
What I didn't realize is that something ***bad was just around the corner***,
and I would lean heavily upon the verse God had given me in that beautiful walk.

I think about that often during my morning devotions.
And I've heard so many people say something similar—
that ***God seems to give you just the right word***,
Just when you need it.
Have you ever felt like a Bible verse, story, or sermon was written ***just for you***,
Just for your situation?

And have you ever ***thought of someone*** in need,
just before they called you on the phone?
Or had a feeling of premonition?
What about déjà vu?

How do you explain these experiences?
Do you believe in ***a sixth sense***?
Or a ***spiritual world***?

I read something interesting about ***sharks and birds***---did you know that they have
a sixth sense?
It's a magnetic sense.
A man named Rupert Sheldrake wrote a book called *The Sense of Being Stared At*,
and he writes about how sharks and birds have a ***magnetic*** sense,
that enables them to respond to the earth's magnetic field.
Isn't that fascinating?

Sheldrake goes on to suggest that humans have *a spiritual sense*, that connects us to one another, and the world.

He says that most people have sensed when others are *staring* at us, Behind our backs.

And sixty percent of us claim to have experiences of *telepathy*. Rupert Sheldrake, *The Sense of Being Stared At* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2003), pg. 24.

Some say that we have *this sixth sense, or extrasensory perception*.

Beyond the traditional five senses, of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste.

But what about a spiritual sense—*deep in the heart and mind*?

What about a sense of the eternal?

Do you have that kind of sense?

What if Paul is talking about this, when he encourages us *to not lose heart*?

He says that we can have *hope*,

because our momentary *affliction*—all the pain of this life---

is nothing compared to the eternal *weight of glory* we'll eventually experience.

And where is that eternal glory?

It's *beyond the surface* of this world, and our lives,

In the spiritual world.

Paul says *what can be seen is temporary*,

but what cannot be seen is eternal.

What if we really do have a sixth sense for the eternal side of life?

What if that sense is actually the *presence of God* inside of us?

The Bible definitely says that God's Spirit resides in us---

And I think children seem to know intuitively--

That Jesus lives here—right in our *hearts*!

And what if we all have this spiritual sense,

Because we are made in the *image of God*?

Genesis says that God made us in God's image!

If we believe in a spiritual sixth sense—

Couldn't that bring us hope?

It has definitely brought me *hope*.

It lets me know that God is at work in my life.

I feel more *connected to God* when I pay attention to spiritual things,
In my heart, and all around me.

Paul reminds us in his letters to the Corinthian church,
That we *hold the presence of God inside our hearts*.
And here he says: ¹⁶ *So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is
wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.*

We all know that our bodies are wasting away,
They are imperfect, failing, struggle and suffering.
But Paul says there's an inner nature being renewed!

I wonder, where do you locate God?
This has been a *debate* in theological circles.
In 1934 two theologians, *Karl Barth and Emil Brunner* had a serious debate over
the location of God—specifically, the *point of contact*,
Between humans and God.
Barth believed that we find God *outside* of us,
while *Brunner* insisted that the point of contact
was *within* the human heart.

The funny thing is, when I heard about this debate,
I was thinking—*WHY is this a debate?*
Isn't God in *BOTH* places?

In these verses *Paul says* exactly that—
God is found *within the human heart*, where our *inner nature is being renewed*
day by day,
And God is *beyond us*—eternal in the heavens.

The Benedictine Monk named *Bede Griffiths* traveled the world,
and asked people from all different religions—*Where is God?*
And strangely, Hindus and Buddhists and Orthodox people in the East,
pointed to their own *hearts*,
while Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the West,
would consistently point up, *to the sky*.

Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*, (New York: New World Library, 2001), 79.

So how would YOU answer that question? *Where is God?*
Would you point to your *heart? Or to heaven?*

How does that affect your faith?

Celtic Christianity often talks about *'thin' places*,
 The times and places where humanity and God meet—
 where the eternal and the temporal come together—a thin place.
 That's what our Memorial Garden and walkway are designed to be—a thin place.
 A sacred space where we can meet with God.

Today many people know
 that they have experienced God's presence at different times,
 but we do not always have a *good vocabulary* to describe that.
 Paul is giving us one!
 Paul knows that God's Spirit lives within us,
 and Jesus is working in us to make us new creations!

Paul also makes it clear that we are *already* in the presence of God,
 But *not yet* in the *ETERNAL* presence of God.
 We are *already* saved by Jesus, but *not yet* in our eternal home.

That eternal home is something we look forward to,
 like the many rooms in our Father's house in heaven,
 that Jesus describes in *John 14*.

It's like we have a *foot in both worlds*—in the *now*, and the *not yet*.
 We *live in* a *physical* world, and a *spiritual* world,
 The one we can *see*,
 And the one we *cannot see*.

Each dimension is *just as real and powerful* as the other.
 Some say that Paul separates the physical and spiritual realms,
 But I believe he sees them working together in our lives.

What does this all mean to YOU?

What if you can find *comfort*—
 knowing that your inner nature is being renewed day by day?
 What if you can find *strength*—
 knowing that there is glory
 beyond this life of affliction?
 When I think about all of that—it brings me *hope!*

Taking time in this Memorial Garden is an acknowledgment of God's presence and power—in our lives, in our community, and in this *thin place*.

Our Christian faith says: what *we see is not all there is*—we have something much more than our daily struggles! Even death is not the final word. We believe in an eternal life, or as Paul says an eternal glory--- a time and place to dwell with God forever.

Of course, all of our suffering *do not feel like slight, or momentary*, but in an ETERNAL perspective, It's just a *blip* on the radar of life.

C.S. Lewis has a great book called, *The Great Divorce*, about a bus ride from hell to heaven. And in it, everything in heaven is solid, and **REAL**, *It's heavy, and weighty*, So much, that the grass in heaven hurts the feet of the people visiting from hell, Because they are not as 'real' as the people in heaven.

Lewis describes hell as a dark, lonely place, Where people keep drifting further away from one another, and away from the light. *And in Hell everything is shadowy, nothing is solid or real.*

Isn't that an interesting perspective? The *eternal*, good stuff is heavy, weighty, and REAL. And the *evil, suffering*, bad stuff is momentary, shadowy, not solid.

Goodness holds weight in the world. Evil does not. And the presence of God—is always with us.

Rev. Mark Barger Elliott tells a story of *a teacher and his disciple*.

The disciple asked the teacher---*where do I find God?*

The teacher replied, *right here*.

Then why can't I SEE God?

Because you do not look.

But what should I look for?

Nothing, just look.

But at what?

At ANYTHING your eyes slight upon.

But must I look in a SPECIAL kind of way?

No, the ordinary way will do.

But don't I always look the ordinary way?

No, you don't.

But why not?

*Because to look, you have to be **HERE**---(You're mostly **somewhere else!**)*

Mark Barger Elliott, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol 3, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 113.

I pray that ***all of us would look for God***—right now, right here.

In our ordinary daily lives.

In our hearts,

In our church, our community,

And in sacred places, like this Memorial Garden.

Hear the ***Good News of the Gospel***, friends.

We don't have to lose heart,

Because God is with us,

God is renewing us,

And there is an eternal glory awaiting us.

And for this, all God's people can say together, Amen.