

FOCUS: The Good News is we are called to be active in our ministry to the world.

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is the feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord, and the last Sunday after the Epiphany. Seven weeks ago, we heard about the wise men coming from a foreign land to see the new-born King, Jesus, and how this marked the bringing of the Good News to the Gentiles. Six weeks ago, we marked the start of the public ministry of Jesus with his baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist, and heard the voice of God call out, “This is my Son, with whom I am well-pleased.” Today, on the mountaintop, Peter, James and John are witnesses to Jesus standing in the presence of Moses and Elijah, and the radiant glory of God coming upon Jesus and the voice of God again declaring Jesus as his Son and admonishing the three disciples to listen to what Jesus has to say. “Hey guys,” God is saying to the disciples, “this is my Son. I have sent him, and he is going to be sending you, and your ministry to the world is important. Take notes, there will be a quiz!”

However, rather than exploring in greater depth this particular aspect of God’s glory shining before the people, I find Paul’s letter to the Corinthians to offer us some strong words of advice—and admonition—that is good for us to hear right here in Beltsville, just as it was for the good sisters and brothers in Corinth.

“Therefore, since it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.”¹ This is not only true for Paul, but true for us as well, and we should rejoice and be glad it that fact.

Note that Paul says, “by God’s mercy ... we are engaged in this ministry.” Not by the call of a congregation, nor by our own decision to be here, nor by the invitation of a neighbor to visit, but by *the mercy of God* we have come together in this place at this time to be a community of men and women of the body of Christ to be *engaged* in *ministry*. God wants us to be here in this place to do what we have been called to do—make disciples of all nations and baptize in the name of the Triune God. This is a calling for which we are to be joyful and excited, not sad or reluctant. Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, was writing to a community of very committed Christians who were losing sight of why they were such a community.

Rather than remaining faithful to the message and teaching Paul had brought to them previously, and reinforced in other letters to them, the Corinthians were hearing some in their midst preaching a message that was based more on the law and less on the gospel as a source of salvation. Paul is calling on them to be faithful to the good news that comes in the mercy of God through Christ, and not to fall back on the legalism of the law, as being encouraged by those trying to make the young Christian community more Jewish.

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:1 (NRSV)

God's mercy comes to us through the death and resurrection of his Son, to whom we are called to listen. The mercy we receive from God is life everlasting and complete forgiveness of all our sins. It comes to us in our baptism when we are baptized into Christ's death *and* his resurrection.

This is the message we are called upon to take into the world as part of our ministry here. We are not supposed to hide behind some veil of silence, keeping the glory of God from others, but to let the glory of God which shines in us because of Christ show forth to all the people. The veils are gone, and we can "handle" the truth and light which come to us through the glory of God and the mercy God bestows upon us.

Paul concludes this verse saying "we do not lose heart." This, dear sisters and brothers in Christ, is a word of comfort for us as it was to the Corinthians. In the midst of change and trouble and turmoil, it is easy to lose focus and in losing focus, we lose heart for that which we are called to do in our ministry. Losing heart—that is, giving up on our ministry here—is *exactly* what the devil wants from us. It is *exactly* what those who are weak in faith and seek to run away when things aren't perfectly calm and easy wants to happen.

When we look at our ministry only through a lens colored by legalism and law and the thoughts and actions of human beings, we are led not to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the mercy which comes to us from God through that gospel message, but to a place and condition of fear and hopelessness. When we put human thoughts and things before the ministry to which we are called, it is easy for us to lose heart.

Being Christians isn't easy. We are called to do tough things, and to respond to situations with a firm understanding of the grace and mercy of God under which we live each day. We are called to hear the word of the Lord, the Good News that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior and that we are justified—saved, redeemed, made righteous before God—by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. It's not what we *do* or how we *do* it that gives us God's grace. Frankly, it's not about *us* at all.

God sent his only begotten Son to die for us because God loves us—every single one of us—and doesn't want us to perish, but to live life and life it abundantly. God sent his Son to earth with a message, and that message continues to come to us by the power of the Holy Spirit speaking to us in our worship, our prayers, our daily life, our interaction with one another and our ministry in the world outside of these walls.

God has a message for us just like God had a message for Peter, James, and John. It is the same message, in fact. It is the message in which we are to not lose heart while we are engaged in this ministry.

God said, “This is my Son in whom I am well—pleased. Listen to him.”

In order to listen, we have to stop talking and be silent.