

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our text this morning is from Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth, "For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are

true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.”

Now is the day of salvation. This is an interesting idea that Paul sets before us. Remember, Paul wrote these words to the people in Corinth. He wasn't sitting in Ephesus in 55 AD thinking to himself, “Yes, I will write these words to the people in Corinth, but it'll *really* be a secret message to a congregation of people in New Mexico 1,900 years into the future!” That is simply a ludicrous way to approach Scripture. Rather, we must understand that this Scripture, like many things in Scripture, has a meaning in the context in which it was written and in our modern context. Thankfully, the meaning is the same for them and for us.

Yes, it was the day of salvation for the Corinthians. But we ought not to say that the day of salvation has already passed us by. There are those who would teach this way. Even in the first century, Paul had to deal with people in Thessalonica teaching that the return of Christ had occurred and everyone left had other problems, that they had missed out on the day of salvation. In the years since, there have been many who have made similar claims, up to our present day. So what do we do if today is the day of the salvation? Ought we go out into our world and find the handful of people who claim to either be prophets or the Lord himself and swear our loyalty to them? Of course not! God preserve us from such false and evil teachers.

No, today being the day of salvation means that today our Lord Jesus Christ comes to us by the Word and the Sacrament. Today the Holy Spirit enters into our hearts, minds, and souls with the life-giving faith that is necessary for us to have a share

in the salvation that was won for us at the cross by our Lord.

Today the Father has provided for you the things necessary to come and receive this message of faith and life.

It does not mean that we need to continually again and again throughout our lives rededicate ourselves to Jesus in some big rebaptism ceremony. It doesn't mean that we need to stand up here and all proclaim again once and for all that we are Christians, at least until the next time we need to do it. In truth, we live out our Christian lives by daily drowning the Old Adam in the waters of our Baptism, the one baptism for the remission of sins. We confess our faith today and every week together in the words of the Creed that have been given to us by the Church. Those who would create new ways to do what the Church and Christians have always done do so simply because they reject what has come before.

Yes, we have been given a wonderful gift of immeasurable worth. Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross for you and for me. Our sins have been atoned for. Your debt to God has been wiped out, paid by the innocent blood of Christ. The salvation given to us is the same as the salvation given to the Corinthians. It is the same salvation given to the saints in the Old Testament. It is the same salvation that is being given to almost 10,000 people a day in Africa. It is the same salvation that will be given out freely to every person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness until the day when our Lord Jesus returns for his people. The kingdom of God comes.

But that doesn't mean that our status as God's people means that our lives will be full of comfort and free from trial and sorrow. As Paul says in the text today, he and his fellow workers experience, "... afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless

nights, hunger...through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.” We all know these problems as well.

Though we may not be able to go down Paul’s list with a marker and check off every one that we ourselves have experienced as though that is somehow what makes us Christians, we know that there are things that befall us in life that bring us sorrow and pain. We join with Paul, the other apostles, the early church, and countless Christians throughout the ages even to the present day in our cries because of the troubles of this life. We mourn the evil of ourselves or others. We fear what the future will hold because of health problems.

We experience fear, wondering if we will be taken care of when we need it.

But Paul helps us here as well. He reminds the people of Corinth, and us, that they commended themselves to God in all things. Our God does not abandon us when we suffer. When we forget this, we receive this faith in vain. Rather, we always focus and direct our eyes to Jesus. He knows our suffering because he suffered for us. More, he suffers with us as we are afflicted. But through it all, we are rich. We need have no fear of death. We have much to rejoice over.

We rejoice because even when we mourn, we know that it is yet another opportunity to be comforted by the Gospel. It is another way to see the cross in our own lives. We are continually driven to our Lord Jesus Christ. We cling to Jesus because it is through him that we find salvation. It is through

him that we find eternal life and it is through him that we are comforted in our sorrows.

Truly, through Christ, we have the promise of the greater comfort. We have the promise of eternal life. Paul believed in part that today was the day of salvation because tomorrow is not promised. Jesus may well return at any time. Every generation since has believed that theirs would be the generation to see that great and glorious day of the Lord. In truth, we look forward to this day because it is the day when all will be set right. It is the day promised by our Lord when he said that he would return.

About this very text, St. Basil the Great only a few centuries after this was written said, “Now is the acceptable time,” says the apostle, “now is the day of salvation.” This is the time for repentance; the next life, for reward. Now is the time to endure; then will be the day of consolation. Now God is the helper of such as turn aside from the evil way; then he will be

the dread and unerring inquisitor of the thoughts and words and deeds of humankind. Now we enjoy his longanimity; then we shall know his just judgment, when we have risen, some to never-ending punishment, others to life everlasting, and everyone shall receive according to his works.”

Truly, we have salvation in Christ today. We have it tomorrow. For us who remain faithful and steadfast in this, we have a gift that can never be taken from us. Thanks be to God that he has given us his very own body and blood that we can have the certainty of his love toward us and that through his sacred medicine of immortality, he can seal our faith and preserve us so that we can stand amongst the faithful on the Last Day and into eternity, showing that we have not received these gifts in vain. Amen.

Now, may the peace that surpasses all understanding keep
your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord to life
everlasting. Amen.