

Battered By Foul Balls (Do Not Lose Heart). Pastor Fritz Wiese. 9 June 2024

Anyone ever have a bad day? Many of us have had bad days, bad weeks, and bad months some times.

This week I heard a true baseball story from back in the 50s. Richie Ashburn, center fielder for the Philadelphia Phillies, swung and hit a foul ball that went into the stands and hit a spectator named Alice Roth right in the face. Security jumped right into action, loaded her on a stretcher and was carrying her away when the unthinkable happened. Can you guess? Play had resumed and Alice was hit by a second Ashburn foul ball, this time in the knee. Poor Alice. Now that is a bad day!

Our lesson today is from the New Testament book of Second Corinthians, a letter Paul writes in which he admits he is having not just a bad day, but maybe a bad year. In the very opening of his letter, Paul writes this: *“We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly unbearable crushed that we despaired of life itself.”* Wow. That’s bad day level. Have you ever admitted on Facebook or Instagram you were having tough times like that.

Next June, we’re taking another COS Faith Pilgrimage to follow Paul’s footsteps. But we know that on our comfortable bus and cruise liner, we’ll have it a lot easier than Paul did! For Paul’s journeys included persecution, shipwrecks, beatings, prison and probably martyrdom. Paul made enormous sacrifices for the cause of Christ and yet he was constantly criticized by people both inside as well as outside of the early church.

But Paul never seemed to get overly discouraged. Indeed, for me this week, leaping out of the lesson is his call, **“Do not lose heart!”** Would you repeat that with me? (Do not lose heart!). For the Jesus followers in Corinth and for the Jesus followers in south Atlanta, Paul advises, no matter what kind of bad day or year, you’re having, do not lose heart!

Tom Petty and Stevie Nicks sang, stop dragging my heart around. Pat Benatar accused a boyfriend of being a heart-breaker. Steve Perry

lamented about his Foolish Heart. Bon Jovi pleaded that he was shot through the heart. Ray Charles requested that his heart be unchained. But whatever your heart is going through in your seasons of torment or despair, Paul pleads, do not lose heart.

In our lesson today, Paul explains a few reasons why.

One powerful perspective is offered in verse 14. “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.”

One driving force behind our bad days is because we still miss family and friends who have passed away. I was talking with one of the moms who brought her kids to Lutheroad this week and she was sharing what a rough time her own mother was facing. In just a matter of months, she’s lost both her husband and her young adult son. That’s a lot to endure. This week, we’ve been remembering the 80th anniversary of D-Day. 2500 American soldiers lost their lives bravely storming the beach. It’s always tough to lose a loved one, but when they’re just 20 years old, give or take, that’s really rough. How does a family not lose heart when they’re children are killed? A lot of love and support—including God’s promise of the resurrection. St. Paul emphasizes what we profess in the creed weekly, that we believe that there is more than this sometimes very cruel and short life. Why? Because the God who raised Jesus will raise each one of us as well. And therefore, as we like to say around here when we lose loved ones, it’s never a final goodbye with Jesus. It’s a “see you later.” Because of the resurrection, we do not lose heart!

Next, verse 15, is utterly astounding. “Yes, everything is for your sake . . .” I think this one verse could be a whole sermon. It’s just packed with encouragement. In the first phrase, Paul reminds everyone struggling with tough times that God never forgets you. On the contrary, God is on the move for YOUR SAKE. Martin Luther gave us a gift in emphasizing the gospel power of the two little words, only 6 letters: FOR YOU. That’s why when we come to communion—and everyone who helps distribute communion really listen up here because this is ongoing training on the spot—when we come to communion Luther said we should hear “this is the body of Christ, FOR YOU. This is the blood of Christ, FOR YOU. Yes, it’s for the whole world. But simultaneously, it’s FOR YOU specifically. That’s the mind-blowing gift of faith isn’t it? How can God be intimately in touch with everything going on in every square inch of our globe—and galaxy for

that matter—but also be ALL IN on me, personally? And you, individually? What a God we have!

In his next breath, Paul specifies what's FOR YOU—it's GRACE! To breathe grace is essential always, but especially on bad days. We bomb the test, the promotion goes to someone else, the relationship is faltering, we lost our temper, the doctor shares some difficult news. Or we just feel listless in life. We get angry at God because life isn't fair. We can get angry at ourselves, God, and everyone around us.

Sometimes, people day dream about starting life over. Apparently, the Hayden Planetarium in New York issues an invitation for anyone who would like to make the first journey to another planet to submit an application. Within a matter of days, over 18,000 people applied. Psychologists concluded that the vast majority wanted to start a new life on another planet because they were so discouraged by life on this one.

My wife LuAnne is shocked with how few students these days know about Charlie Brown and the Peanuts Gang. But some of you remember. We can certainly imagine hearing oft-challenged Charlie Brown telling Linus, "Sometimes I feel like I want to run away from everything." Overhearing the conversation, Snoopy reflects, "I remember having that feeling once when I was at the Daisy Hill Puppy Farm. I climbed over the fence . . . but I was still in the world!" Wise old Snoopy shares the human dilemma. Wherever we go, there we are. And we bring our internal struggles and brokenness with us wherever we go. Yes, bad days have to do with the outside world. But a bad day also has a lot to do with what's going on in YOU. And you take you wherever you go.

But that's the joy of GRACE. God doesn't wait for you to get your act together before God comes knocking. God loves, hugs, intercedes for, and champions you regardless of the health of your grade point, bank account, cholesterol level, facebook followers, or religious pedigree. Here's how Martin Luther describes it for folks who are convinced that God would never show mercy to them: "God receives none but those who are forsaken, restores health to none but those who are sick, gives sight to none but the blind, and life to none but the dead. God does not give saintliness to any but sinners, nor wisdom to any but fools. In short: God has mercy on none but the wretched and gives grace to none but those

who are in disgrace.” Sounds like good news for anyone who is enduring tough times, however you define them.

And then I love what Paul says next, about grace “extend(ing) to more and more people.” Like bread rising, like shaken champagne spraying, like kudzu growing wildly, God’s grace expands—and more and more people get to accept that they are accepted by the Lord. The result is that more and more people shift from an attitude of despair to what? An attitude of THANKSGIVING. Of being appreciative. Of being people of light even when walking through valleys of darkness.

Or, as Paul says in verse 16, as Jesus’ family, we are people who never ever lose heart. Our hearts might get too hard sometimes. They might be broken or pierced. We might get a bit cold-hearted from time to time. Like the Grinch, hearts get too small in various situations. But we are people, because of God’s promise, who never LOSE heart. For we know that God has triumphed through Christ, and the Holy Spirit wants to keep pouring what’s in our Lord’s heart into ours.

That’s why Paul, whose seen more than his fair share of bad days, put life this way right before today’s lesson picks up: 8 We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, 9 persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, 10 always carrying around in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

Nope. Paul doesn’t white-wash the challenges of this human life. Verse 16 talks about our “outer nature wasting away.” Can anyone give testimony? I’ve joked with you before about being a young guy losing my hair in college. Now, I’m frustrated with eye-glass management and stretching my back and using skin cream to prevent too much work at the dermatologist. Yes, the decades bring the wasting—strong word, Paul—of our outer nature. But time with Christ also brings the gift of renewal and development of our inner nature. For with God, any adversity can also yield maturity. Any bad day can be blessed also by our Lord into something good for us. Amen?

Our lesson closes by comparing tents to houses. I remember one time camping in a tent on a rafting trip. It poured that night. And our tent could

have been the straw house of the 3 little pigs. Because it was no match for the rain, which soaked our sleeping bags.

What our faith offers us is not a tent, Paul says, but a house, built on firm foundation. Our congregational survey expressed appreciation for COS being a church that tries to make a difference locally, regionally, and globally. And one cool expression of that is our Construction Crew that served down in Griffin Georgia the last couple of months. Almost 900 hours of volunteer love in action—building not a tent but a house. Thanks Tor & Mary Brunso and team for your wonderful servanthood.

I don't know if the Corinthians' challenges included tornadoes, like the one that destroyed the Griffin home of Christy and Ricky. I don't know if you feel that the repair work you need in your life is taking too long, like those who endure storms ravaged homes across our country probably do.

But in your trials and bad days, can you embrace the hopeful call to you from St. Paul? That amid your struggles, "do not lose heart." For Jesus is with you, renewing you in good times and bad. We might at times feel like we live in rickety tents, buffeted by life's storms. But can you actualize the promise that a HOUSE of Grace not only awaits you in heaven. But can be your residence right now, today?

In Jesus' name and in his hopeful heart and house, Amen.

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2 Corinthians 4

13Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, 14because 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. 15Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

16So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. 17For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, 18because 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.

5:1 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.