

## The Meaning of My Existence

Sermon for the 2<sup>nd</sup> to Last Sunday of the Church Year

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10



*For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup> For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, <sup>3</sup> if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened – not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup> He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. <sup>6</sup> So we are always of good courage. We*

*know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, <sup>7</sup> for we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup> So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*

In the last 20 years alone, there have been tremendous advancements in our world that are hard to imagine. From a completely normal telephone, a device came into being that can take pictures, that you can shop with, pay the bills from, or even send whole libraries from one place in the world to another place. The only thing missing is that you can't wash or iron with a phone. And there's more to come. In the meantime, we stand on the verge of such a real internet experience that you can drink coffee with your grandma in Iran as if you were in her living room. But these rapid developments also have a downside. And the downside is perhaps that we have more and more expectations. And the expectations are even fueled by advertisements so that people are dying to buy things that they may not really need. So it happens that in Leipzig, all-terrain vehicles that you can travel to Siberia in jostle together at the traffic lights when a very small, fuel-efficient car is completely sufficient to get from point A to point B in Leipzig. And there are many other things that can make us crazy. The important thing is that what I have is better and that it can do even more, even if I don't really need it. All these expectations make people more restless and more nervous. They're afraid of missing out on something and push and shove each other like crazy in front of the stores on Black Friday to buy things they won't really use and, above all, won't make them happier. Paul wants to help us get back to the basic principles in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians. And it's not just about our things, it's about us humans in general. It's about our existence here on earth. Why should I be good? What is my purpose? What meaning does my life have? He speaks in clear words that bring us from the clouds back to the ground. According to Paul, our life is just a tent and is a temporary abode. Paul himself was a tentmaker and understood what this was. A tent is only needed as a stopping point. For a short time, it offers

protection and must then be taken down and be replaced with another home. Paul repeatedly had to experience this kind of dismantling in his life. More than once, he faced his own death and then had to come back to the living again. We can also observe the mortality of our own bodies. No matter how much we stuff ourselves with expensive multi-vitamins, these things really just prove that life is not easy. It goes differently than we think and want! Not everything is predictable. And there isn't a quick, practical solution to every problem. What we build our hope on even has to decay and be dismantled. Even our bodies steadily become older and weaker. Our health is always and continuously at risk. We must also expect that we will suddenly and unexpectedly have to give up everything that we have been up to now. The mortal is swallowed up in the immortal, Paul says. The tent must be destroyed. It has become obsolete. It's over for him. When I hear Paul talking like this, then my life, as it now is, is useless and must be replaced with a new eternal life. It is simply just a tent. But we must not misunderstand Paul here. Paul is not hostile towards our physicality. Our body isn't like an old telephone that is placed in a corner because the new model has come. If that were so, my life would be worthless! There are enough people in the world who consider their lives as useless and worthless! Even more terrifying are the many people who can eradicate their own life or the lives of other people in the blink of an eye. Paul doesn't mean that here! It's completely different with him! Our earthly tent in which we now live is not worthless. It isn't worthless because our life with God begins now – in our earthly tent! Jesus Himself lived in our earthly tent and through baptism, He has already united His life with our life. This means that just as Jesus' body is precious and treasured by God, so is our body. That's why in the middle of this life and despite getting older and weaker, I experience the blossoming of a completely new time! My life doesn't end up in the dump of used up life but is fulfilled and sanctified through the body of Jesus who has united with me. My life is not worthless, but valuable!

So there is no question about these two completely different houses. The one is our earthly existence. The other is our heavenly existence. Rather we are talking about our existence as children of God. And there is a straight line that starts here and continues into eternity. From this world to the next. Here, we are already God's children and we will also be His children there. But as God's children, we are like strangers and homeless people in our earthly tents. That's because we can't see God. However, in this foreign place, God gives us something very important on our way. The Holy Spirit as a guarantee. The word, guarantee, means something like a deposit. A deposit always means that a portion is already paid but it is promised that later, the entire amount will be paid. You could maybe imagine this as when we prepare our children for a big surprise. So that the surprise is even better, we blindfold our children's eyes and first let them feel around the room so they can touch and feel the precious gift. We let them guess at what is hidden inside for a while. At some point, the children can no longer hold themselves back and they rip the blindfold from their eyes and see it face to face. You must imagine our life with the Holy Spirit something like this. We cannot see and verify God any more than we can see and verify the Holy Spirit. But He is still there! And He slowly and tentatively leads us to God's love. Slowly and tentatively, we can also recognize God's will in our lives. Sometimes, we can't hold ourselves together. We yearn and groan in our prayers. There are also times when we can't see or feel anything. Then we think that everything is just an illusion. There are times when we believe that we are naked and alone. There are even times when we think that God isn't there. Especially when we notice in our life that everything has an end and is over. In these days especially, we may know that the Spirit is more than just a gift! He is more than the crumbs that God lets fall from the table. The Spirit is God Himself! And because God is with us in our lives through His Spirit, we are in safe hands. That's why He also stays with us in failure and doubt. He gives us courage and hope in miraculous ways and casts out the evil and sad

thoughts. And more than anything else, He represents the intimate fellowship with Jesus and with our dear Heavenly Father. That's why we are never alone! Time and again, I hear people ask what heaven looks like. Some people imagine that in heaven, there is a lot to eat and the people are pretty. What makes heaven heaven is not good food and pretty women! What makes heaven heaven is that we see God face to face and will live with Him. All this begins now as the Spirit of God lives in our earthly tents.

Because that is the case, we often groan. We don't just groan because we are discouraged, but also because we are hoping and guessing along the way. And the Spirit is never silent. He is also on the move within us and sets God's will free in our lives so that we can do what God expects of us. Through God's Word, we realize what we should do and what God wants from us. And in this sense, Paul comes to speak of the last judgment. There, we will stand one day before Christ's judgment seat. A peculiar picture. The judgement seat of Christ? Isn't Christ there to completely wipe sin off the table? As you can see with this picture of Christ's judgment seat, what we do and what we leave behind in Christ isn't meaningless. Christ doesn't keep silent about our sin and wrongdoing. But the image of Christ as the world's judge can't be more comforting. Because Christ shows us outright who we are. But at the same time, He is not the judge of the world who wants to condemn us! No, Jesus is also our advocate! On the one hand, Jesus stands at God's side and fulfills all righteousness. On the other hand, He is by our side and wants nothing more than that we can come to Him and live with Him.

When my gaze falls on Him, my gaze falls on God's Holy Will. My purpose and goal is to be the way He wants me to be. Amen.