

On not losing heart (2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1)

Learning to trust in God requires an act of will.

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Trusting in God sometimes feels like an act of will. I want trust to be easy. I want to relax into God's protective shelter. But when our outer nature is wasting away and our momentary afflictions are grasping our attention with vigor, it's hard work to remember that we are part of something bigger, much bigger, than ourselves. It takes effort to direct our thoughts and awareness toward an invisible inner renewal taking place—and to trust in the power of God to guide us.

Perhaps learning to trust in this process of inner renewal requires a kind of maturation in faith that we don't notice, just as we often don't notice growing more mature in our daily lives. Our experiences change us; as we grow and gain experience, we are transformed until one day we realize, I'm not the child I was. I'm not who I was yesterday or last week or last year or ten years ago. And yet, I am! I'm that same person, but I'm changed. My inner nature has been renewed again and again, and in the process I have gained some gravitas, some weighty presence, a portion of wisdom and presence.

It seems similar in the spiritual life. It can happen without our noticing. Though our earthly tent is buffeted by heavy winds—Paul means our bodies, not the earth itself—there continues to be an inner transformation that is often difficult to see. It is rooted in and comes from the power of God, an eternal treasure contained within

the clay jars of our bodies, as described just a few verses before this week's reading from Paul. Our treasure is "this extraordinary power [that] belongs to God and does not come from us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

Learning to trust in that extraordinary power of God within us, over and above our own human striving, requires an act of will: a decision to refocus our awareness on our participation in the grand story of God and God's creation. In that eternal story we are secure. In that eternal story we do not lose heart. Though we cannot see the eternal and cannot measure its weighty presence, we place our trust in it—sometimes by an act of willful redirection of our thoughts, sometimes by an act of letting go of the illusion of control. We live in a house not made by hands but nevertheless created by a power beyond our capacity to fully understand.

When we trust in that power, when we lean into it, when we remember that we are part of that divine unfolding story, we have something powerful to support us. We can release our grip on the fears that sometimes drive us and grasp onto something much longer lasting. We live in eternity, the eternal now which has already begun.