

2 Corinthians 4:16-17 “Making sense of life”

Part of the Rocky Mountains in the Bridger Wilderness Area in Wyoming is quite rugged and majestic. It draws hikers and tourists and they are often asked for comments and recommendations so that management might improve their visit. Here are some actual suggestions from the comment cards.



1. The trails need to be reconstructed. Please avoid building trails that go uphill.
2. Too many bugs and leeches and spiders and spider webs. Please spray the wilderness to rid the area of these pests.
3. Please pave the trails so they can be plowed of snow during the winter.
4. Chairlifts need to be in some places so that we can get to wonderful views without having to hike to them.
5. The coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me awake. Please eradicate these annoying animals.
6. A small deer came into my camp and stole my jar of pickles. Is there a way I can get reimbursed?
7. Escalators would help on steep uphill sections.
8. A McDonald's would be nice at the trail head.
9. Too many rocks in the mountains.

There are too many rocks in the mountains!! Do you remember Elvis Presley, crooning the song written by Marty Robbins? And not only Elvis – to name a few, there’s been Ray Price; Eddy Arnold; Johnny Bush; Frankie Laine; and of course Marty Robbins. The chorus has filled my heart, more than once, when my world seemed torn apart –

But this time, Lord you gave me a mountain,
A mountain that I may never climb
It isn’t just a hill any longer
You gave me a mountain this time.

There are too many rocks in the mountains!! Please avoid building trails that go uphill!! Here in the real world, stuff happens. Life is messy and often doesn’t make much sense. Paul talks about this very subject in this morning’s passage.

As we know from his letters, Paul’s life, after giving it to the Lord, was anything but simple or easy. Because of his faith and because he refused to stop talking about the Lord, he was imprisoned, beaten, threatened with death, exiled, persecuted. Every pathway was strewn with rocks, and the angle was more or less, straight up. However, Paul describes it all as “slight momentary affliction [that] is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure,” [2 Corinthians 4:17]

Without dismissing how difficult and painful life can sometimes be, Paul reminds us that what we see and experience now is temporary – like a tent that gets worn and torn and destroyed; that there is an eternity awaiting us.

Be that as it may, we live, here in the real world – temporary though our lives are. How do we cope with the rocks, the darkness, the wear and tear on our tents? More than this, when the mountains overwhelm us, does it make any sense to believe in a God of love and grace, of providence and mercy, of blessing and light?

Someone has asked the questions that many of us have asked at one time or another ... “why does God let all this happen? What is the cause of our suffering?” His response is, “The Bible does not tell us. If we choose to spend our time agonizing over the origins and meaning of pain – why, why, why – we will inevitably be very frustrated. Here is what the Bible does tell us: God is in charge of the universe. God permits our pain. And God is in that pain with us. We never go into a nightmare or through a nightmare alone.”¹

There are too many rocks in the mountains – but the One who created all that is, is in charge of even the mountains. The psalmist says that God goes through every valley with us, even the valley of the shadow of death. Jesus tells us that there is nowhere that we go alone, that God is with us, even when it’s raining down rocks in our hearts.

Paul writes, “So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.” [2Corinthians 4:16]

Our culture seems committed to a sort of denial of reality. We spend billions of dollars on products that promise to keep the “tent” from showing any signs of wear and tear and decay. And, while our bodies and minds are gifts from God, described even as the temple of the Lord, and we should therefore take care of them, if our whole focus is on what’s seen, that which is temporary, we risk missing that which is unseen and eternal.

Have you ever thought about what you’d like inscribed on your tombstone. Over the years, I’ve wandered through a cemeteries, reading the inscriptions. Someone reported seeing this, “When we saw the glory of the sun setting, we said, ‘It will be a lovely day tomorrow.’” For my own, I would like the simple words, “And I am grateful.”

“Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.” [2 Cor. 4:16]

There’s a story about an elderly woman who began to lose her memory. Once she had known much of the Bible by heart, but the time came when she could recall only one verse: “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him.” Then little by little parts of this verse began to slip away, until she could weakly repeat only this much: “... I have committed to him.” As she neared death, her memory was limited to one word: *him*. She repeated this word over and over. It was all she had -- but she had the essential thing.

¹Glen W. McDonald, in “Grace in the Midst of Suffering”, as found in *SermonStudio*, June 10, 2012, issue. Copyright 2012 by CSS Publishing Company, Inc., Lima, Ohio.