

“Saints Fit for Heaven”
II Corinthians 5:6-10
By Pastor Art Scanson

In the book, *The 12 Essentials of Godly Success*, Tommy Nelson tells about a young man named Curt. Curt is 13 years old. But he is physically and mentally disabled. He can't talk. He can hug you and love you.

But here is what Nelson loves about Curt, He is innocent and pure, and he loves people. You can be a big or a little guy, a female or a male, any race, any income, successful or a bum; it doesn't matter. If you hug Curt, he will hug you back. He can't tell you how he feels, so instead he cries out in delight. Everyone around him takes care of him. He thinks the entire universe was made as his sandbox. Every person that meets him loves him,” says Nelson.

When Curt wakes up in the morning, has his yogurt, and sits in his hot tub, he never worries about life. He doesn't know where his next meal is coming from, and he doesn't care, and the reason is he knows his father loves him. His dad is about six feet two and weighs about 280. His dad bench-presses 450 and squats about 600. And yet when he reaches down with his big hands, lifts his small son, and puts him on his lap Curt knows that whatever happens, his daddy is the biggest, toughest, strongest fellow in the whole world. And his daddy loves him.

Our scripture for today has Paul saying that we should live by faith and not by sight. So what does it mean to live by faith? I wish it meant we could live as simply and with as much confidence as Curt in our story. That we could trust God to take care of us in the same way Curt trusted in his father. I realize that our world is not as simple as Curt's and yet it might help us to not always make things as complicated as we do.

Let's look at Paul's writing - Read II Corinthians 5:6-10. What does it mean to live by faith, and not by sight?

First, it would be that no matter how hard we try we cannot know the future. Life happens and sometimes it comes easy and sometimes it is even terribly cruel.

Author John Maxwell tells about Lawrence Hanratty, a man who, a few years ago was named the “Unluckiest Man in New York City.” He was even profiled in the *Los Angeles Times*. Lawrence was almost electrocuted in a construction site accident in 1984. For weeks he lay in a coma, with his lawyers fighting for his liability claim—that was until one of them was disbarred and two of them died. In the meantime Lawrence's wife ran off with her lawyer.

Then Lawrence lost his car in a terrible crash. And to make matters worse, after the police had left the scene of the accident, criminals came along and robbed him. Then, his insurance company fought to cut off his workers' compensation benefits and his landlord tried to evict him. By now he suffered from depression. He had to carry oxygen with him at all times and he took 42 pills each day for heart and liver ailments.

It was at this point that a city councilman took up his cause and neighbors began to rally around him. And Lawrence Hanratty summed up his life with this: “There's always hope.”

There is hope. Too often we convince ourselves that there is no hope and life only gets worse. Having faith may not make life as great as we would like but with faith in God and letting God into our life we will not be overcome.

There is also the story of Karla which is about how cruel life can be and yet funny at the same time. You see, Karla had been taking ski lessons. She was still on the beginner's slope. However, she had gotten to the point where she wasn't falling too much. So, she decided to go down the more advanced slope known as the Big Hill. When she got to the top, she realized this was not a good idea. But she realized it was too late to turn back. She couldn't stay up there forever, she says, so she started down. Everything she'd learned disappeared from her mind. She yelled, "Get out of the way!" As she flew straight down the hill. At the bottom was the ski lodge with a fence in front of it. She was able to dodged the fence but then she ran smack into the side of the building. She survived, but it was a painful learning experience. When she hobbled into the ski lodge a few minutes later, she found her twin sister rolling on the floor.

"What's so funny." Karla asked.

Holding her sides, tears running down her face, her sister gasped, "You missed it. Some idiot just ran into the lodge!" Sometimes we look back at event of life and have to laugh even though it was not funny at the time. Remember, life happens. And we are reminded to live by faith and not by sight. We have no idea what might happen tomorrow. And none of us is immune to the good and the bad of life.

The second thing living by faith and not by sight means that whatever occurs, with God's help, we can make it. With faith we can take what comes, whatever it is, knowing that with God's help, together we can handle it. There will be those valleys that we will walk through. It won't be easy - maybe even horrible. It is the 23rd Psalm tells us that we can trust our way through. "*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures, he leads be beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. . .*"

Yes, these are amazing words of comfort. Yet they do not say that we will avoid the valleys, BUT we can make it through the valleys because God is with us.

You have heard it said, and the little children will lead them. Here is an example for us. Pediatric oncologist, Diane Komp, writes of her experiences with children who suffer with cancer. She tells about the terrible times that they and their families sometimes go through.

In her book *A Window to Heaven* she tells of one child who was dying. The parents were trying to be strong, but were unable to hide their suffering. What was truly strange and unsettling to them was the calmness of their child. Here they were, afraid of losing the child that they loved, filled with unbearable sadness, and their child seemed just the opposite—content, happy, at peace. It was such a puzzle.

As the young child awoke on the last day that he would live, he spoke to his parents of why he felt no fear. He had met Jesus, he said, Jesus had come to him and told him that everything would be all right. He didn't need to be afraid. That beautiful child had seen Heaven opened. He knew what Jesus was all about.

In his simple faith he was able to experience a high level of living by faith. In his simple life he was able to allow God into his life and thereby experience living by faith. So often we as adults allow our lives to become so complicated we make it difficult for God to get to us. We are so busy trying to handle it all by ourselves - remember, God waits for us to invite God into our lives - living by faith makes room and spaces for God's presence in our life! It is that most fundamental task - trust. Do we trust God with our life?

This is another thing we need to remember - living by faith comes through trust in a daily

walk with God. It's that learning by doing idea. We learn to trust by trusting!

Henry Ward Beecher, one of the great preachers of the past, gave this illustration in one of his sermons:

A lobster, when left high and dry among the rocks, isn't smart enough or does not have enough initiative to make his way back to the sea. Instead, he waits for the sea to come to him. If the sea does not come, he remains where he is, and dies. He does this in spite of the fact that the slightest exertion would enable him to reach the waves, which are perhaps tossing and tumbling within a yard of him.

Beecher's point was that some people are like that lobster. At some time in their lives they find themselves left high and dry among the rocks. Life has been cruel to them, as it is to all of us at one time or another. And they give up. They become bitter. What they do not realize is that trust is something that develops as you confront your difficulties with God's help. When you confront your fears, you become better able to trust in your own abilities. You learn to trust others. And you discover that there are those loving arms beneath you carrying you in those difficult places where you cannot make it on your own.

My friends, may we walk by faith, not by sight. That is how we grow into saints fit for heaven! It is not an easy journey, but with God's help we can finish the journey as those saints fit for heaven.