

You are probably aware of the saying "seeing is believing"... This relates to a very concrete view of the world. The person who says this needs to see something before they will believe it.

My mum when she sees me says that "I heard that you did such and such...", "I heard that you had a good time at the Royal Melbourne Show" for example.

I ask "Where did you hear that?" She replies that "I saw it on the national nine news."

It has become a recurring joke because she often hears about things through my brother,

or from something my wife has posted on the website Facebook which my Aunties in Scotland have seen and then mentioned to my mum on the phone (neither my parents nor I have a Facebook account). A round-about way of getting the news, but nevertheless. Still, in each case, more direct than seeing it on the news.

I was able to tease my mum recently through the medium of coffee. Bear with me, I saw it on the National Nine News. I happened to catch a story about **broccoli coffee** being served in a cafe near where she lived. The story was shown on Channel Nine News but when we went there last weekend they didn't have it. They said that it was just a one day trial and the news got it wrong. Shock, horror. I asked for a **beetroot latte** like I'd tried before, but the guy who knows how to make that wasn't in. I settled for a **matcha (green tea) latte** which kinda looks like a broccoli latte might. You can't believe everything you see on the **Channel Nine News**.

The passage from Second Corinthians mentions that Christians walk by faith and not by sight. What does it mean to walk by faith and not by sight? It sounds like a tricky concept. But actually, many of our priorities in life as Christians are shaped by the experience of a guiding principle beyond the things we see right in front of us. If you have children or grandchildren it makes sense (from a worldly perspective) to put effort into looking after them because they are going to continue to carry on your genes and your memory into the future. But why then care for someone who is not related to you? From a purely functional worldly viewpoint this makes no sense. And yet, here

in this community I hear stories all the time of ways that people are looking after others and selflessly giving to the wider community around us. That to me is an example of walking by faith and not by sight. Our priorities as Christians are not shaped just by the things we see in front of us, but guided by different values which come to us from God.

This passage speaks about the life we live on earth, and the hope we have of heaven. Throughout the first four chapters of 2nd Corinthians, Paul has spoken about his relationship with the Corinthians, delays to his plans to travel and see them and spoken about human weakness, and God's greatness. Now he focuses on the sensitive issues of dying and of eternal life.

In the first part of the chapter which we're not looking at today, the Apostle talks of the groaning that we all do in these bodies here on earth. I don't know if your body ever groans. Mine does...*sometimes*. Paul talks about the difficulties we can have in this life, and the difficulties we have in our bodies. It's important I think to note this. This is not a theology of unrestrained celebration, this passage takes seriously the ways in which our bodies limit us, it takes seriously the challenge of living in our bodies. I was speaking to someone during the week about the wonderful technological advances that have saved people's lives and enabled people to have much better lives. But nobody lives forever. We see here an acknowledgement of how limited our human bodies are, and a lament about this.

I have completed some pastoral care training at the Austin and Repat hospitals. Speaking to people in their hospital beds is a real reminder of the difficulties of illness and the inevitable decline which we will all face. But what really struck me about some patients was their hope of heaven. As I got to know some people they shared stories about their lives. Sometimes I was given the opportunity to pray with people. Sometimes those people I spoke to about heaven were in their last days here on earth. Their courage was impressive.

In hospital there was a whole range of attitudes to illness from denial, anger, sadness, despair and through to acceptance, and even at times embrace. For many that I spoke with, this trip to hospital meant a big turning point as they had been living independently, but would now have to go into

care. I'm sure you know of similar stories, and I've heard some since I've been part of the Manningham community.

I remember as a 20 year old I was admitted to Ringwood Private Hospital with a lump on my neck that might have been cancer. I was having a biopsy and spoke to the nurse in the cancer ward while I was being prepared for surgery. As was my habit, even back then, I asked her about her job and what it was like. She told me that she met the loveliest people who were patients there and that they didn't deserve to have cancer. Her comment really struck me as sad, but then I wondered *who did* deserve to have cancer. It is a terrible disease. For me the lump was not cancer, just something that could be removed easily. That question of *whether someone does* deserve cancer has always stuck with me. I don't know the answer to that question. Soon after that a friend asked me if I was scared of dying. He said do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. It was a bit confronting to think about, but he was correct. A bit insensitive, but caring because he wanted me to remember the big picture, the heavenly promises, not just the fear of life lived on earth.

Paul in verse 6 says we should be confident because we have something to look forward to. He says that while we are at **home in the body** (pause for laughter), that we are here living in our bodies, that we are in a sense away from the Lord. We are not as close as we will one day be to God.

He reminds us in verse 7 that we walk by faith and not by sight. That our trust and promises are not just placed in those immediately around us.

Paul then flips his earlier statement that we would **rather be away from the body** so that we can be at home with the Lord. This is a big statement. It is one thing to think about the aches and difficulties we face. It is one thing to say that we look forward to the future in heaven with God. But to say that we would prefer to be away from the body? **Why does he say this?**

Often in Paul's writings we see him so caught up in the excitement of what he's saying that he makes really strong arguments. He understands the joy of living on earth, but also looks forward to a future heaven where he will

know God more intimately, and not faces the challenges of earthly life, of which there are many.

In verse 9 he says that whether we are *home* or *away* we aim to please Him. That in whatever we do, we serve and worship God.

Verse 10 talks about appearing before the judgement seat of Christ. Paul has already spoken in verse 1 of this chapter looking forward to the home which God has made for the believer in heaven. This judgement seat cannot therefore be one which would exclude the believer from heaven. The commentators agree that this judgement is one of commendation and assessment of the believer's life. Paul had been judged formally in his life many times. He went before a tribunal in Corinth when he had been there previously and was judged for his activities. I have been to Greece and Turkey on a "Footsteps of Paul" tour and we visited the ruins of Corinth. We were able to share the Lord's supper as a group, and also saw this place where a tribunal met and pronounced judgement on various things. This place was **called the Bema** and here is a picture I took. There is a small sign that lists the location as Bema. This is just basically a wall with the remnants of a small platform where the Judge would have sat. It would have been much more ornate with shade coverings and luxurious seats for the judiciary. It's possible that this was where Paul was judged, though it may have been another site. As I mentioned, the judgement referred to here is likely one about assessing the life lived rather than condemnation. In the words of the Bible verse and the hymn, **no condemnation now I dread.**

So what is the Heavenly hope that we have? What does this look like? Verse 14 tells us that the love of Christ urges us on, other versions say that Christ's love compels us or controls us. This shows us that God loves us, and that Christ has made it possible to be turned into creatures of perfect love for others.

The last verse in this passage is verse 17. *So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!* Here we see hope for now, and hope for the future. God has been doing a work in those who believe, he has been making us new. We are not fully at

home here on earth because our true place is in heaven. We deal with the difficulties and joys of life in our human bodies, but we look forward to being with God permanently, intimately and relieved of any burdens we have had.

While we live as mortal we have our friends, our families, our communities to support us, and to give support. But in future we will be with God directly, and with other people too in heaven. This is great news. We long for heaven while we live here. We enjoy this life, and share in the good and the bad, but we know that there is so much more.

We walk by faith, and not by sight. We walk by what God has given us, and not merely what we see in front of us right now. Some here have known each other for 50 years, some longer. Some great friendships have developed over those decades, but how much more spending an eternity together, worshipping God. We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. There should be no fear. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We are a new creation, see, everything has become new!