Paul advances his construction theme in the second letter to the Corinthians, and he continues to build with care on the foundation of Jesus Christ. But instead of focusing on the construction of a Christian community in Corinth, he draws our attention to what God is raising up in us. “We know,” he says, “that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence” (2 Cor. 4:14). Paul is not raising walls to give us shelter in this life; rather, he is pointing us toward the resurrection, which will raise us into everlasting life.

This is a truly radical focus because shelter is one of the six most important daily needs, according to neuroscientist Dr. Nicole Gravagna. At the top of the list is *food,* which provides calories and a variety of nutrients. Next comes *water*, giving the body the ability to process food and remove wastes. Third is *shelter*, which protects the human body from blazing sun, freezing temperatures, wind, and rain. That is why the tiny homes of Detroit are so important, protecting human beings from extreme temperatures. Number four on the list is *sleep*, which is best experienced in the protection of a shelter.

These top four human needs should not come as a surprise to anyone, because we all know how important it is to have food, water, shelter, and sleep. Jesus himself commands us to give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty (Matthew 25:35). But in his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul wants us to look past these earthly needs and to focus on the resurrection that God offers us as we follow the path of Jesus.

“So we do not lose heart,” says Paul. “Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:16-18). Paul realizes that our “outer nature” is temporary, whether it is our physical body or the physical home that provides shelter for our bodies. Whether we live in a mansion made of stone or a tiny home constructed of wood, it will not last forever.

“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed,” concludes Paul, “we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (5:1). At the end of our life, our body and our home are nothing more than an “earthly tent.” No matter how well built, it will not last. At that point, we move into “a building from God…eternal in the heavens.”

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he stayed with a married couple named Aquila and Priscilla; “they worked together — by trade they were tentmakers” (Acts 18:3). Paul earned his living in Corinth by making tents…temporary, earthly shelters. Paul knew that people need shelter. I think he would approve of the tiny homes being built in Detroit today, innovative solutions to the affordable housing problem in many communities. But he would want us to remember that no matter where we live, our time on earth is transient. We should focus on the “building from God” that will be our eternal home. Which is why Paul’s words to the Corinthians complement the last two human needs identified by Dr. Gravagna: *other people* and *novelty*.

Dr. Gravagna says that “regular connection to others allows us to maintain a sense of well-being.” We cannot thrive in isolation. It is much better to sit on the porch of a tiny home and say “hello” to our neighbors, or join a small group at church, or sing in a choir, or work alongside others in a community mission project. Being connected to other people is key to our emotional and spiritual health, which is why Paul tells the Corinthians that “you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27). God has so arranged the body, says Paul, “that there be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another” (1 Cor. 12:25). Because one of our greatest human needs is other people, God places us in a community called the body of Christ, the church.

The sixth and final human need is *novelty*. “Novelty creates the opportunity to learn and the ability to fail,” says Dr. Gravagna. “Without regular novelty, motivation wanes and a healthy sense of well-being is lost.” Since novelty is anything that is new, original, or unusual, Paul would probably connect novelty to our eventual home: “a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1). When it comes to buildings, there is nothing more unique than a home built for us by God. Paul counsels us to look forward with faith and hope. “We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen, for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18).

So, what do these buildings tell us about what is essential to life, on earth and in heaven? First, we are challenged to care for each other in this life and to work together to make sure that everyone has adequate food, water, shelter, and sleep. Paul wants members of the church to “have the same care for one another” (1 Cor. 12:25) and remember that all of the commandments of God are summed up in the words, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Romans 13:9).

But at the same time, we need to realize that everything in this world will eventually pass away, so we should live by faith and focus on the building from God that is eternal in the heavens. This means trusting Jesus instead of the leaders of this world. It involves working for the common good, instead of pursuing only personal success. It includes valuing what cannot be seen — honesty, integrity, sacrifice, love — instead of the things of this world that can be seen. Remember, says Paul, that “what cannot be seen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). At the end of life, we will all go home, and it will not be to a tiny home or a spacious mansion. Instead, it will be to a house not made with hands. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Prayer: Unlike earthly kings, you, O Lord, are ever steadfast and faithful. You sent us your Son, Jesus the Christ, to rule over us, not as a tyrant, but as a gentle shepherd. Keep us united and strong in faith, that we may always know your presence in our lives, and, when you call us home, may we enter your heavenly kingdom where you live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

**Sources:**

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* Prayer from *Revised Common Lectionary Prayers* copyright © 2002 Consultation on Common Texts admin. Augsburg Fortress.  Posted on [Thematic, Intercessory and Scripture Prayers for the RCL](http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayers.php?id=164), Vanderbilt Divinity Library.

**Buildings from God**

Sunday, June 6, 2021  2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

The apostle Paul was a skilled master builder. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he said that he “laid a foundation” in the city of Corinth, and then others came and built on it (1 Cor. 3:10). Paul believed that “each builder must choose with care how to build,” whether they use gold, silver, precious stones, wood, brick, or straw. But in any good Christian construction project, said Paul, the “foundation is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 10-12).

In Detroit, Michigan, a development of tiny homes is being built on a Christian foundation. The developer is Cass Community Social Services, which began during the Depression when Cass Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church opened a soup kitchen. In the 1950s, the congregation expanded its services, creating an evening program, a free Bible class and a senior’s program. In the 1980s, the church started working with the homeless, providing a safe place for people to shower, do laundry, use the phone, and look for work.

Today, Cass is building tiny homes to provide shelter for people in need. Each house is a single-family home of 250 to 400 square feet (about one-seventh the size of the average new home), on its own lot with a lawn. Homeowners include single people and couples who are “living on little income: senior citizens, college students and other young people who have aged out of foster care, and people who were previously homeless or incarcerated.” The homes are built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and designed to nurture self-esteem and restore people’s dignity. These tiny homes are owned by their residents, an investment “which fosters pride and responsibility.”