

John 16:23-33
"Overcoming the World"
Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 26, 2019
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

Christ Himself says: ***"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world"*** (John 16:33).

So, why, then, do we fear the world as if it were triumphing over us?

Have you found yourself worrying about the future? Do you ever feel like the world is winning the culture war?

You may be depressed seeing the morals of Christianity shoved to the side in favor of hate, violence and sexual immorality. We see this all the time if you turn on your television set. The moral-oriented television shows of the past have been replaced with sex and violence.

Our news programs have been replaced with non-stop political bickering and constant opinion and conspiracy theories.

The world keeps telling Christians how to live out the faith. The world desires that Christians keep their faith to themselves, rather than allow Christians to tell others about Christ.

The world opposes Christianity and desires to suffocate the good news of Christ.

We may feel like our religious freedom is at stake, which it might be. But should that deter us?

That surely didn't deter Jesus as He accomplished His earthly ministry. Jesus was always at odds with the world.

“He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him”
(John 1:10-11).

Jesus came to bring peace to this troubled world, even if the world didn't want it.

So, what are Christians to do in this world that seems to thrive on hatred, violence and sexual immorality?

What are Christians to do when we feel we are out of place, out of step, out of time? What are we to do?

[The Answer]

In this morning's gospel lesson, Jesus gives us the answer. He teaches us to rejoice and to pray.

As the world comes at us with attacks, Christians, one and all, rejoice, with exultation springing. We proclaim the wonders God has done, how His right arm the victory won!

First, we rejoice knowing that by grace through faith in Jesus, we are saved. We are reconciled with God the Father. We are secured through Christ's death and resurrection! As Luther writes in our hymn: “For I am yours, and you are Mine, And where I am you may remain; The foe shall not divide us.” (LSB 556, stanza 7)

You see, the foe is the world and the world is led by its prince, Satan. So, no matter what the foe throws at us, as long as we remain in Jesus, we are protected from the evil one.

Second, Jesus speaks of prayer. He teaches His disciples to pray once more in order to endure the future. We pray to endure the future.

Now, the world is against prayer. The world doesn't want anyone speaking to God. This is why over and over again, the world says: prayer doesn't work.

The world would rather see humanity respond with unconstrained emotions, rather than speaking to God and reading His Word for answers.

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus speaks to His disciples on Maundy Thursday and teaches us that we are not alone in worldly tribulation, for He has given everyone in Jesus direct access through prayer.

Jesus teaches us that through Him, we have access not just to Jesus, but to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Even though Jesus has not died and rose as of yet, He has declared victory over the world. He declares victory, because He knows the outcome. He knows the future. He knows, because He is the very Son of God.

Through Christ's death upon the cross and His resurrection from the grave, we are now free to pray to the Triune God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – whatever is on our mind. Jesus alone has reconciled us to God the Father by grace through faith in Him.

But are there any exceptions to what we can pray for? Well, we are to pray for all things that are good and right, as we prayed our Collect of the Day this morning. The only things we can't pray for are things that are the opposite, which are evil things and wrong things.

To put it simply, God will not accept a prayer about harming your neighbor or anything else that conflicts with God's Word, but we are free to pray for anything that is good and right, even stupid things, small things, as well as large and impossible things. And when we pray, we are to pray knowing that God's will is done, not our will.

So, we pray when we have doubts, questions, desires and especially when we face tribulation.

[Tribulation]

Again, today's gospel text takes place on Maundy Thursday, the very night when Jesus was betrayed. Tomorrow would be Good Friday, the day of His death.

For the disciples, they were soon going to face tribulation. They were soon going to face doubt and fear.

Jesus knew what His disciples would do when He would be arrested, tried, crucified and die. He knew that they would scatter.

Jesus said, *“Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone”* (John 16:32).

And so they did. They scattered and hid from the Jewish authorities in fear that they would soon face the fate of Jesus.

They thought the three years with Jesus all came to a close. For it appears that they didn't expect to see Jesus again, even though Jesus just said a riddle about His death and resurrection, *“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while you will see me”* (John 16:16).

We, too, scatter much like Christ's disciples. They said they believed Jesus came from God the Father, but when the pressure came, they ran from their confession of faith. They deserted Jesus.

We say the same confession in the Creed. But, how many of us run from our confession of faith when we're questioned if we abide in Christ's teachings?

The world is always assailing us. Sometimes we give in, but when we turn back to God through repentance, we are forgiven. Christ's disciples were forgiven for their unbelief. Likewise, we receive the same forgiveness.

Jesus has promised tribulation as we live in the world. As Christians, we are outsiders to the world. We love as Jesus taught us to love, yet we are persecuted. When we do good by promoting life, we are punished as evil doers. We are attacked precisely because we have one Lord Jesus Christ. We are attacked because we are not one with the world.

But, each time our Christian faith is attacked by the world, we should remember that the victory has been won. Jesus has overcome the world. Jesus has conquered the powers of sin, death and Satan upon His people. Sin, death and Satan no longer have any power of us.

[Peace]

Jesus gives us assurance that we will come out of the tribulation and receive peace.

Jesus says, ***“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”*** (John 16:33)

For His disciples, they were in much tribulation following Christ’s death, but their tribulation turned to joy when Christ appeared to them in the locked room three days later and said, ***“Peace be with you”*** (John 20:19).

At that moment, they were at peace. Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

No longer did the threats of the world bother them. They knew that Jesus was victorious over the world! Jesus gave them peace!

Today, we will have much trouble. The world is against us – just like it was for Jesus and His disciples. But, we know the ending! We know that Jesus has overcome the world. We know that by God’s grace, all who believe and trust in Jesus inherit eternal life.

In the meantime, we pray amid tribulation knowing that God is listening. We know that whatever we ask the Father in Jesus’ name, He will give it to us. We know that through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has given us direct access to the Father. We know that we share in Christ’s victory over the world!

Each Sunday, Jesus reminds us that we are at peace as we receive strength for our weak faith in the Divine Service. We remember our baptism as we begin each Divine Service with the Invocation. We receive forgiveness of sins and strength for our faith with the Means of Grace, as we hear His Word and receive His Sacrament.

[Jesus Has Triumphed]

So, why, then, do we fear the world as if it were triumphing over us?

We should feel encouraged. We should be at peace. But, as Christians, we live in two spheres. In the world, Christians will face tribulation. We will face trouble, turmoil and persecution, precisely because of our faith in Jesus.

In contrast, we also have peace. We have peace in Jesus. Jesus assures us that whatever the tribulation, peace will prevail by grace through faith in Him.

Jesus has overcome the world. The battle has been waged and won by Jesus. He won this battle for you and for me. Despite the world continuing its wretched attacks, those in Christ share the victory He has won. As long as we remain in Christ, we cannot be harmed by the world's evil.

We have overcome the world through the blood of Jesus, shed for you and for me. We have overcome the world through the bodily resurrection of Jesus, which gives us sure confidence in our peace. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠