

“Take heart; I have overcome the world”

John 16:23-33

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 26, 2019

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Our text, Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace.”*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Our gospel reading for this morning continues the discourse of Jesus from last week, when he said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.” Again, in that text, Jesus had promised the Spirit of truth to lead the Church into all the truth. Again in that text, Jesus compared our life of sorrow awaiting joy as to a woman in labor, whose anguish is forgotten when the reward of a dear child arrives.

In this morning’s text, all of that continues... Jesus saying that our hour is coming (by application; certainly, this text was in the Upper Room as he spoke to the twelve, but, by application...) ... our hour is *coming*, and indeed is now *here*, to depend upon the dear Son of God who once arrived in the flesh to die and rise and to declare and make us dear children of God... that we might be certain that the anguish and pain of labors in this world will give way to the reward to come. And our text concludes with the words with which I

began last week's sermon: "In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world."

Thus, the main theme of our text today is to take heart; the main theme for us to carry this week (especially this week in which we anticipated the Ascension, often misunderstood as if to mean Jesus is simply leaving us)... the theme to carry this week is to take heart. The first half of our reading says, "Take heart in prayer! Ask in my name (Jesus says), for the Father himself loves you as dear children." And the second half of our reading says, "Take heart, because you will be scattered in fear... the Son of Man, His Church, His promises, will all come under attack and even fall into the hands of sinful men... and you will all be tempted to despair and weep and desert me. But (Jesus says) I am not alone, for the Father is with me."

That reminds me of what Jesus said when the women of Jerusalem wept alongside the road as Jesus carried his cross to Calvary; he said, "Weep not for me, but for yourselves." In the same way, he says here to the disciples, "I am not alone; the Father is with me." What a comfort even that of itself ought be! That whatever Jesus does (and he does it all on our behalf) must be beneficial for us, because the Father is with him and pleased by him.

Jesus continues (paraphrasing), "I am not alone; the Father is with me. But, you, if *you are scattered from me*, then what safety do *you* have? Are you not alone? But in me you may have peace.

Remain with me; stay close to me. In this world you will have tribulation, but I have overcome the world.”

Now, we can talk about this in theory, but isn't this exactly what plays out in daily life?, even if you don't recognize these words carrying you each day. You need not wonder how to *speak* to your family and friends about such things; rather, you may simply *show* them – no matter how young or old they are – that your safety is in Christ Jesus. *Apart* from him, you are alone; but, *in* him, you have every comfort.

Each Sunday, we begin, “Our help is in the name of the Lord.” Those aren't just words... they're a way of life; they're an outlook on life; a safety in life; a promise of life beyond life. If Jesus forgives you, and the Father is with Jesus, then the Father forgives you! If Jesus promises to see you through daily life, and the Father is with Jesus, then you can take confidence in the Father, “Our Father, who art in heaven.”

Thus, you need not worry about learning the eloquence of Jesus' discourse to teach your children at any age to follow your outward confession of faith as an example; rather you simply learn to live what you hear and say each Sunday – “Our help is in the name of the Lord.” Learning to *depend* on that for forgiveness and eternity... learning to *live* that way by daily conduct; even if you can't talk eloquently to your children about the comfort and confidence that is yours in Christ, you can still show them how to live in it.

For example, just this past week, I was headed out the door to head to church one morning after our family's morning prayers and – as the kids were saying goodbye, one of the younger ones asked, “Dad, could you die in a car accident?” And I answered, “Well, I don't plan on it, but I suppose I *could*.” Then another asked, “But, you *won't*, right?” And I answered, “Well, that's in God's hands, isn't it?” Then a third asked, “But, what God will make sure you're safe, right?”

Notice the concern... the concern was certainly for me, but – right under the surface – it was for themselves. “If separated from Dad, will we be **alone**? Will we know safety and security?”

Now, how is a father to answer this? How easy it would be to say, “Nothing's going to happen to me! Of course God will keep me safe. I'll see you tonight!” And, to some extent, maybe that's the comfort that our littlest need.

And yet, there's comfort in the truth of the matter, so that we don't have to tip-toe around the harsh possibilities of this world, but I could honestly say to them, “Well, I don't know what's going to happen as I drive to work or drive home from work. But I know that it's in God's hands and that, even if he allows me to die, I will go to heaven because Jesus died for me; and, if I go to heaven, *he* will still take care of *you*. He will care for you either through me, or without need of me, and one day we will all be together again in heaven.” And then, I could say goodbye, expecting full well to see them that

evening, but with them assured that – one way or another – they would see me again, and they themselves would be cared for by their *heavenly* Father.

Notice, there were no big doctrinal assertions that needed to be made; there was no terminology from the Greek or Latin that needed to be explained. By their father’s actions and confidence, they knew they could take heart, not in him and his supposed invincibility, but in Christ and his promises. “Take heart, I have overcome the world,” Christ says, so that his eternal plans can be daily on our lips, in our hearts, and giving confidence to our lives.

That recognition of one’s vulnerability, but comfort in God’s plans in Christ... that simultaneously points us to and is learned in prayer... had my family and I not just concluded *morning prayers?*, so that my children saw (and my wife and I were reminded for ourselves) that even adults vulnerably bow their heads and send prayers heavenward, totally dependent upon the good and gracious God. We depend on his strength; we depend on his mercy; we depend on his forgiveness; we depend on his promises. And we are certain of all of this good will of God toward us because of Christ, that we can look at that cross and see Jesus paying for our sins and can know that nothing can separate us from the love of God. So then, we can pray...

We can pray without being ashamed that our children and grandchildren see our vulnerability; we can pray without concern

that we don't have all of life's answers. We can pray with glad hearts that the next generation learns from us that that status of "Baptized child of God" is something that – at any earthly age, any social status – is of the utmost importance and comfort, allowing us to appeal to God with boldness... again, an appeal that need not be eloquent or impressive, can even be memorized and – in that sense – repetitive! But, it is still the prayer of faith that asks of the Father in Christ's name, that confidently goes directly to the Father by the merit and name recognition of Christ. Not only can we say *of* the Almighty indirectly, "Our help is in the name of the Lord," we can also speak *to* that Lord *directly*, "Our Father who art in heaven."

And, where that life of prayer teaches us (and teaches our children and grandchildren as they learn from us), where each day that prayer life reminds us of our vulnerability in this fallen world, but also teaches us our certain access to the Holy God as our sins are covered by the merit and blood of Christ, *then* how much can we rejoice in the hour that is coming, and indeed is here each week, when we are blessed to come before God in the Christian assembly, and – with the fellow "vulnerables" and fellow "penitents" – we gather at the feet of Jesus. We who in life are so easily scattered, so easily distracted and burdened, we may in this place 'experience' the gracious exhortation that the Spirit of truth and comfort has proclaimed through the words of the epistle, "Brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, and

since we have [him as our] great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith... Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, *for he who promised is faithful.*"

God in Christ is faithful... how can we behold an image of the cross of Jesus' passion and question that? Far more importantly than an image of his cross, how can we hear his word and receive his Body and Blood and question that truth?: God in Christ is faithful.

And yet, we must learn *how* God's faithfulness answers our anxieties and vulnerabilities. Our Introit says, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved." And we say, "Well, that sounds so wonderful, but I *know* of times where the righteous have suffered, even after praying!" Again, we reason, "if God will sustain me, then why does the psalmist continue, 'My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me.' There's no reason to have terrors of death if death will not come!"

But, the Lord's care for us is far wiser, far broader, for more eternal than is our own focus. The psalmist continues, "But I call to God, and the Lord will *save* me... He *redeems my soul in safety* from the battle I wage." In our vulnerabilities, we worry about the immediate result of today; in his fatherly care, the Lord safeguards the result of eternity. This is how we ought learn to pray, then, and how we ought learn to define life and to answer our children and

grandchildren, “Even if I die before we see each other again, the Lord is still with you and me both, and we will see each other again.” Or, as the prayer from our youth and into old age reminds us, “If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.”

We quickly read in Hebrews last week (to finish off our Bible Study for the spring) this admonition, the comfort of which may not be what we expect to hear. The author writes, “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for the Lord has said (and you would expect the answer to be, “I will give you all you need or want”, but that’s not it! Rather, the comfort is) “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

In your vulnerabilities in this fallen world, you need not be scattered by enemies of the Gospel or cling to worldly comforts and idols. You may confidently live dependent on the Spirit of truth, who – by His holy Word – leads you into all the truth and teaches you to confess to your children, your grandchildren, your neighbor, your spouse, *yourself* that Christ who promised is faithful: “In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

In the Name of the Father  
 And of the Son  
 And of the Holy Spirit.  
 + AMEN +