

Victory!

I didn't know Kathy very long. I only met her twice. The first time I met her was at our church's outdoor service, a slightly warmer time back in August. And yet it was a day much like today. We got to worship our Lord together, singing hymns and reading his Word. We got to have a wonderful meal surrounded by our church family. And then we played Bingo.

Round after round, other people kept winning, and Kathy sat waiting. Her numbers just weren't being called. But still, she told me she was having a great time. Eventually, in one of the later rounds, Kathy finally won and got to cry out, "Bingo!" She got to take hold of a prize.

Picture a Kathy in your life. Someone waiting for their end. Think of the course of their life, all the ups and downs, the twists and turns. We all have a different path, different family and friends. We have our own homes, careers, likes and dislikes. We're unique in that way. Keep your personal "Kathy" in mind.

While we're each unique, there's something that we all have in common. There's someone who we all know who's been a key figure in our lives. There's a reason we've gathered this morning at the break of dawn. We all know Jesus. Our confidence in Christ means that at the end of all our waiting in this life, we will all cry out, "Victory!"

This life is a battle. From the day we're born, we endure the sting of sin. We face hardships, seen and unseen. Some of us have debilitating diseases that seem to define our whole story. They might not be due to anything we did, which makes it even more frustrating. We might struggle with relationship turmoil or financial burdens. Some people travel through life with a heavy heart that darkens every day.

Because of sin in the world, we all face afflictions that make life seem unbearable. We are constantly waiting, and sometimes it seems like we're just waiting for the final blow of defeat. Death seems like the

inevitable end. As mere flesh and blood humans, we won't go on living forever. But through Christ, we know that we can cry out, "Victory!"

It's a mystery how this can happen. How can one man from 2000 years ago make such a difference? And yet, we've all seen people who seem so frail, or to use the Apostle Paul's word from 1 Corinthians, so perishable, yet they were rock solid in their faith.

Because they knew victory in Christ, they showed care and concern for others in need. Even in their weakest moments, they found time to make a phone call to a friend, to lift up prayers for others, to give a testimony of that firm faith.

All because of the inheritance waiting for them. That inheritance wasn't a monetary gift. It wasn't a new house passed down in the family. They knew they would be receiving the kingdom of God. This holy home prepared for all God's people, a home that can never be destroyed or taken away. That's a prize worth waiting for.

Indeed, those who have already died have been changed, transformed from their perishable bodies. They don't have to wait any longer for renewed strength. Because they live in heaven, our loved ones are free from tremors, weakness, and falls. All the worries and weariness of this world are gone. The darkness of the day-to-day is obliterated by the light of our risen Lord. Our loved ones don't need to rely on doctors and nurses or home-care, because they stand hand in hand with the Lord. They stand with our champion. Our victory comes from someone who isn't just flesh and blood, but also true God, the one with the power to overcome every enemy – sin, death, and the devil.

Just a few days ago, we focused on the cross. The devil thought that he had defeated Jesus there. Satan thought that he erased any hope that anyone could have. Without faith, we would look at Jesus dead on the cross and see defeat. Without faith in Christ, death would be our end. And if Christ had not been raised from the dead, our faith would be in vain. We would still be stuck in our sins.

But Jesus didn't stay dead on that cross. For us, the cross becomes a symbol of victory! We have an empty cross at the front of our church as a reminder that Christ wasn't defeated. After the empty cross came the empty grave. Three days after he was buried, Jesus came out of his tomb. Death and the devil have no power over the almighty God. Death has been swallowed up in victory! Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? Jesus Christ is no longer dead. He has indeed been raised from the dead, and Paul says that Jesus is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Yes, it's true that death comes to all people because we have been stung with the infection of sin. But because Jesus crushed the devil's head and broke the chains of death, now life comes to all people. His victory over sin and death is ours through the gift of faith. We know that our victorious Savior will raise us up with each of our "Kathy"s and all the dead on the last day to take us to our home in heaven.

This is the inheritance freely given in God's love. This is the certainty for everyone who's part of his heavenly family by faith. Whether we die or we're still alive on the earth at the end, we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. Just as your loved one is currently clothed with the imperishable, our bodies will also be transformed. Through Christ, we will live in immortality, crying out, "Victory!" Thanks be to God for giving us that victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

For now, we're waiting. We are still laboring in this life, in a world filled with pains. At times, this life might seem unbearable. Our eyes and hearts are still clouded from time to time. Paul ends this great resurrection chapter of the Bible with an encouragement to stand firm. Stand as all the saints stand – hand in hand with the Lord.

When you cling to Jesus' death and resurrection, nothing can move you. Jesus promises that he will never lose the ones whom God the Father has given him. While it can be challenging at times to hold fast and not despair, especially without your loved one there to support you and encourage you, in Christ you can stand firm, knowing that your labor is not in vain.

You have a prize coming. You may have to wait a while, as other people hear their names called, as others get their prize before you. When you play the waiting game, time seems to drag on. It doesn't seem like things will change in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye. But we know the inheritance that we'll receive at the end of our waiting. No more pain, no more sting of sin, but instead a heavenly home.

We know the gift that Jesus has promised to all who believe in him. We who are perishable *now* will inherit the imperishable. We will all be changed, clothed with immortality. Because Jesus defeated the enemies of sin and death, we stand firm. We know we will be reunited with all believers to stand with Jesus in his kingdom, and cry out, "Victory!" Amen.