

“Overcoming the World”

John 16:23-33; Easter 6 C

May 1, 2016

Text: “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)!

Well here we are again this Sunday, once more, with Jesus and his disciples in that Upper Room in Jerusalem, on that first Maundy Thursday, on the night before died! As we heard last Sunday, these men were all, by this time, completely full of sorrow. They certainly did not understand everything that Jesus was still attempting to teach them, and it certainly would have been a fair assessment to say that they were all, by this time, were very much afraid.

Friends, I don’t know about you, but to me it is always an encouragement to know that Jesus’ first disciples were real people just like us—with real problems. Nevertheless, the LORD was able to use them. Unfortunately, we sometimes get the false impression that these men were all radically different from us, and that they were privileged to be endowed with some kind of profound spiritual knowledge and courage that would have put them in a class all by themselves; when nothing could be further from the truth.

In the words of our Gospel, Jesus was still teaching his disciples that the nature of the relationship that they had been privileged to share with him and to enjoy with him up until this point, was soon now, going to become changed and significantly changed!

No longer would Jesus be present with them in the same way that he had been present with them in those previous three years. No longer would they be able to come up to him with the opportunity to ask some very big questions, face to face, as they had often done in the past; questions which Jesus reminds them and us—that he had often sought to answer for them in his sharing with them some of his marvelous parables; those beautiful, little “earthly stories with some very heavenly meanings!”

But this certainly did not mean that they would no longer have any real access to the God whom Jesus came to reveal to them. Though Jesus would no longer be visible to them in his flesh and blood as he had been up to this time, they were still going to be able to speak to God the Father directly in Jesus’ own name. Having become reconciled to God the Father through the perfect life, death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ—they would then come to know for themselves what St. Paul told Timothy one day: *“For there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus who loved us and gave himself up for us all” (1 Timothy 2:5-6)!*

Here Jesus is also explaining to us that if we truly are praying to God the Father in Jesus’ name that this understanding will certainly do much to help shape the nature of the questions, or requests, that we will also be putting before God! Always our prayers for others, as well as for ourselves, is that God would work mightily through us to help spread out the kingdom of God among more and more people in this world!

As we heard last Sunday, Jesus wanted his disciples to know that: (1) He would continue to be teaching them some new things; and that (2) He would soon be pouring out the promised gift of the Holy Spirit upon them. (3) Jesus wanted his disciples to know that though they soon would become very sorrowful, that in a “little while later” their sorrow would be completely changed into joy for them once more. (4) Certainly a very big part of the legacy Jesus wanted to leave to

his disciples was the gift of God's peace; a promise that was continuously upon the lips of our Savior, both before he was crucified as well as following his resurrection from the dead.

He had just promised his disciples earlier, in that same room, on this very same evening: *"Peace I leave with you! My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you! Let not your hearts be troubled neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away and I will come to you!' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father"* (John 14:27-28)

This kind of peace that Jesus was going to leave to his disciples—certainly did not mean that their lives would be completely void of all outward strife! Why just think of all the Christians who have served both God and our country as soldiers, who have gone far away to fight on battlefields in foreign wars!

Nor did Jesus mean that we would no longer have any human enemies. Why how it world could he have meant this when he says to us in his Sermon on the Mount: *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun shine on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust"* (Matthew 5:44-45)!

Listen to verse 33 again: *"I have said these things to you that in me, you might have peace!"*

And aren't these the very first words that the Risen Christ first spoke to his frightened disciples in that Upper Room that first Easter evening: *"Peace be unto you. As the Father has sent me, so now I am sending you!"* And he breathed on them and said to them: *"Receive the Holy Spirit! Whosoever sins you forgive they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld"* (John 20:21-22)!

I have a little plague in my office that someone gave me that says: "No Jesus, No peace. Know Jesus, Know Peace." That is, "N"-“O” Jesus, "N"-“O” peace; "K"-“N”-“O”-“W” Jesus; "K"-“N”-“O”-“W” peace.

Jesus says: *"In the world you have tribulation. Take heart; I have overcome the world!"*

The Greek word that is translated as "tribulation" here is *theliphis* – a word that Greek scholars tell us can also be translated into English with the words "anxiety" or "anguish." And we all know what it means, at times, because of the circumstances that are now surrounding us in this life to be full of "anxiety" or to "anguish" over a situation we are up against in this life.

If you are a native South Carolinian, you may especially be familiar with the name Archibald Rutledge who was a great American and author, who published over 50 books; a man who was famous for his poetry. His poetry is considered to be outstanding—so that in 1934—when he was 51 years old, Archibald Rutledge was named the first official POET LAUREATE for the Palmetto State of South Carolina. And this is a title Mr. Rutledge held until the time of his death, in 1973, when he was 90 years old.

In one of his books, Archibald Rutledge shares with us the true story of how he was looking out his living room window one beautiful spring morning. There, he saw a bird working diligently to build a nest in a nearby, ornamental tree. He was so fascinated with the industrious, hardworking nature of this little creature that he spent most of that whole day watching her in action.

During the night, however, a bad thunderstorm came up upon the land; so much so that on the following morning, Rutledge rushed to that same living room window to see how the bird's nest had survived the storm, only to discover that it had not survived the storm at all. Unfortunately, it was down on the ground; torn apart and shattered. But Mr. Rutledge's eyes were immediately drawn to that same little bird, who certainly wasn't mourning and grieving the loss of her devastated little home. Instead that female bird was back at work in the tree, laboring to build herself another nest.

Friends, what in the world was Jesus really talking when he encourages us to "Take Heart!?" Certainly all throughout the Gospels Jesus is constantly telling people to TAKE HEART! What you and I can be sure of is that if Jesus is telling us to take heart, this must mean that there is the distinct possibility that we have "lost heart" somewhere along the way! I just wonder how many of you have ever lost heart. Sometimes we all deal with those things in life that make us tired, weary, discouraged and ready to give up; especially when we are dealing with grief! But when Jesus tells us to "Take heart!" he means for us to allow his Word, and the Word of the Gospel, to encourage us, to fill us with hope, and to be bold and confident, to not give up, to be of good cheer and to cheer up!"

So what Jesus also talking about when he tells us, "I have overcome the world!"

Certainly someone who never met Jesus before and knew absolutely nothing about him could easily, unfortunately, come to the wrong conclusion. When Jesus says, "I have overcome the world," this doesn't mean that he is being just like some other powerful men and women, who lived both before and after him, who have sought to "take over" the world or gain total domination over the world.

Historians tells us that about Alexander the Great who lived in the Fourth Century BC, who had notably expressed his personal desire on more than a few occasions to conquer the then-known world, and history then records that when he believed he had done so, "He wept like a baby because there were no more worlds left for him to conquer!"

Of course, Alexander the Great had no knowledge whatsoever about the great empire of China, nor of the great civilizations that had developed and were flourishing in Central and South America.

Sir Walter Raleigh, who lives in the early 17th Century in England, once hypothesized, that if any nation could ever gain control of the oceans of the world at that time, such a nation could also end up ruling the world.

Much more recently, historians have disagreed as to whether it truly was Adolf Hitler's desire to end up ruling the world, though many of them never have believed that this was Hitler's primary objective. His primary objective was to recapture the Slavic countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia, which were originally Prussian lands occupied by ethnic, German-speaking people—who also point out to us that it was only after Britain declared war on Germany that Germany then expanded westward.

In 1979 there was an article that appeared in a publication known as THE ATLANTIC COMMUNITY QUARTERLY, in Volume 17, page 287, that given the full size and scope of the then known world, consisting of some 140 nations and 4 billion people living in the world at that time,

that no single nation, however big or powerful, could end up actually dominating the whole world.

When Jesus talks to us about overcoming the world, he means that the gift of eternal life that he now imparts to us by the grace of God through his Gospel, has the power to give people a certain kind of staying power and resiliency as they face the challenges and difficulties of this present life, that is unparalleled by any other source of encouragement upon this earth!

This is what St. Paul is talking about when he says to the saints in Rome one day: *“We are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us! For I am sure than neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor thins present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39)!*

The trouble is that we can fail to properly access for ourselves just how valuable this Gospel that we so often treasure and cherish really is to us.

Seventy-five years ago, when crossing the Atlantic Ocean from Europe to North America, or from North America, was something that still happened for people on a great ocean-liner rather than on an airplane, there was a man who once wrote of the experience he had had, while doing that.

Just as there are safety drills, and precautions, that airline flight attendants seek to bring to the attention of all their passengers today, every time before the jet their people are traveling on, races down the run way—though many people are much too busy to listen, or falsely imagine that they already know all that, this man said people upon this big ocean-liners could often ignore the safety drills that took place there also, while the boat was still in port.

He later recalls that when his life-vest was made available to him, that yes, he tried it on, but then took it off immediately, tossing it aside somewhere in his stateroom, never fully appreciating the significance of what that life-vest actually should have meant to him. At that moment, he recalls, if someone had often to purchase his life-vest from him, he probably would have sold it to the prospective buyer for next to nothing; that’s what he easily could have done because on that day the sun was shining and the seas were very calm. **BUT THINKING BACK, IF THE STORMCLOUDS HAD BEEN ROLLING WITH ALL SORTS OF THUNDER AND LIGHTNING, AND THE SEAS WERE AS CHOPPY AS THEY POSSIBLY COULD HAVE BEEN, I PROBABLY WOULD NOT HAVE TRADED THAT LIFE-VEST FOR ALL OF THE GOLD IN CHINA.**

And isn’t too often the rather nonchalant and cavalier attitude that we Christians can take towards our saving faith in Jesus Christ for our souls’ salvation. How often have we greatly underestimated the inestimable value of the kingdom of God, and our residence in it, when the sun is shining and the seas surround our life of faith are completely calm too.

Let’s remember that Jesus never promised us that because we are Christians—we would then easily hopscotch our way through life carefree without a concern in this world. No he tells us just the opposite reality is true.

I want to close by sharing with you those last 4 verses of his Sermon on the Mount when our Lord says to us: *“Whoever hears these words of mine and does them is like the wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of*

mine and does not do them is like that foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it” (Matthew 7:24-27)!

“I have said these things to you so that IN ME you may have peace. In the world you have much tribulation, but take heart, for I have overcome the world!”

There are actually three contrasting statements in this little verse of Scripture. First of all, Jesus two words, “IN ME” are set in contrast to his other words, “IN THE WORLD!” Secondly, Jesus words that “you may have” are set in sharp contrast to the other phrase “you have.”

Thirdly, the word “peace” is set in sharp contrast to the word “tribulation.”

In the fifth chapter of his first epistle recorded for us in the New Testament, the Apostle John reminds that because we have been made one with Christ our Savior that we too have already overcome the world with him too! There in verses 4-5, *“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith! Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” Amen*