

Easter Sunday Sermon: April 16, 2017

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Sermon Theme: Who is Jesus?

1. He has won the victory 2. He gives us the victory

⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

People like to debate what the most amazing victory in sports might be. Some say that the greatest victory was the Miracle on Ice during the 1980 Olympics when a group of American amateur hockey players beat the pro team from Russia. Others say that the Cubs winning the world series last year is one of the greatest sports victories of all time, still others point to this year’s Super Bowl where the Patriots came back from 25 points behind to win. Others would argue for other last minute long pass connections in football, the walk-off home runs, or the unbelievable goals for their teams or sports. There are lots of amazing victories, but it seems like every year there are at least 2 or 3 more amazing wins that are added to the list.

What makes a victory amazing and worth talking about? Usually one team does something that hasn’t been seen very often, or is unexpected or extraordinary. This event or series of events leads one team to an unlikely victory. Then those moments are talked about by sports fans for years.

This morning we are celebrating the most important and amazing victory of all time. This victory did not happen on a sports field, in a gym, or on a rink, this victory took place on a lonely hill and in a deserted cemetery. The results of this victory are much more than a win or a trophy, the results of this victory reach to every person who has ever lived on this earth.

This morning, as we look for an answer to the question of *Who is Jesus?*, we will see the answer: Jesus is the Son of God, our Savior, who has risen from the dead. He has won the victory over sin, death and the devil and he gives that victory to all who believe in him.

We began our service this morning with the suffering and death of Jesus. On Good Friday, we stood at the cross and we saw Jesus’ work to redeem us from our sins. That cost to buy us back was his suffering and death. And yet, as we listened to those words from the cross, when he shouted, ***It Is Finished***, they didn’t really sound like words of defeat. Those words sounded like the shout of a person whose arms were raised in victory.

In Jesus resurrection he would provide proof that all he said, all had promised about saving people from their sins, was true. The resurrection would be God the Father’s stamp of certainly for us that we can and should believe that Jesus won the victory just as he said he would.

We don’t see people rise from the dead today do we? I am not talking about near-death experiences or those who are medical anomalies where the doctors have made a mistake, I am talking about someone who is dead, who lies on the gurney or in the morgue for a day or two and then sits up and begins to talk. If this would happen we might have trouble understanding what was going on.

That is exactly the thoughts that Corinthians had when Paul was teaching them about the resurrection. He told taught them about Jesus sacrifice on the cross. This did not seem to bother them, they were acquainted with suffering and even death. But when Paul told them that Jesus rose from the dead, they were confused.

The resurrection of Jesus confused them because people who died remained dead, they did not return to proclaim and say they won anything. This resurrection sounded unbelievable to them. It was not something that they could easily understand or believe.

When we think about it for a moment, it does sound odd doesn’t it. In this world where we are all in it for ourselves, a man willingly took the place of others to die a horrible death filled with pain and agony. Then after clearly being dead and put in a tomb, he is suddenly not in the tomb any longer. He appears to people,

alive, and declares that he has won the victory over sin, death and the devil. The Bible tells us that without the Holy Spirit working in our hearts this wisdom of God found in Jesus will sound foolish.

The Holy Spirit works faith in us to believe that all this took place so that Jesus would complete the work that God had sent him here to do. Jesus came to earth because he loved us. He lived a perfect life of obedience in all he did, thought and said because we could not do that. After he lived perfectly, he also took the punishment that we deserved because we sin. He walked willingly to the cross to pay the price for our sins. The final punishment for our sins was death..... and Jesus died, just as the Bible says.

But death would not win the victory over Jesus. Jesus defeated the power of sin and the death that it brought. He won the victory.

We see the proof of his victory in our Gospel for this morning. Early in the morning when the stone was rolled away from the tomb by the angel, do you think the guards did not investigate to see what was going on? They went to the Pharisees and reported that Jesus was not in the tomb as he was supposed to be.

When the women came to the tomb, the angel invited them to look in the tomb, not to see the body lying there, but to see that Jesus was not lying there any longer.

And as the women hurried away filled with any number of emotions, Jesus himself appears to them, alive and well. He urges them to go and tell the disciples what they have seen so that they too can celebrate his resurrection.

Jesus not only appeared to these women, he appeared to many others over the next 40 days. By the end of that day it was clear that something amazing had happened. To the guards it was clear that Jesus was not in the tomb, to the Pharisees and religious leaders it was clear that Jesus was gone, but to the woman and the disciples it was clear that Jesus was not gone, he was alive again. He appeared to them and spoke with them. Jesus made many more appearances to many more people showing that he was alive. By the time Jesus ascended into heaven there were many, many people who had witnessed the victory of Jesus' resurrection including the two 2 men from Emmaus and 500 followers who saw Jesus when they were gathered together.

The Corinthians struggled with Jesus' resurrection, but they also struggled with the thought that they would rise from the dead too. When they thought about it, their thoughts stayed with a very human understanding of death. How would they rise? Would they rise with their diseases and illnesses still with them, with the rot and decay of death still clinging to them, as a skeleton whose flesh was long since gone.

Paul tells them the resurrection that Jesus would give to them be completely different from their earthly understanding of death, it would be a wonderful victory in the blessings of heaven. Listen as Paul explains the victorious resurrection that Jesus gives to us. **Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”**

Paul tells us right away that much of the resurrection is a mystery to us. We are not meant to understand all of it, yet that does not mean that we can't look at these words and find comfort and joy in these words about heaven. We will be changed and that is a great thing. Our life of victory in heaven will be eternal, Paul calls it imperishable. We will no longer experience sin, illness and disease that are part of our human bodies. We will be immortal and sin, disease and illness cannot touch us. Death will no longer have a hold on us. We will no longer mourn the death of a loved one because death has been swallowed up in victory.

Later in 1 Corinthians, Paul describes the resurrection as the difference between a seed, our bodies on earth, which is planted and the plant (our resurrection bodies) that sprouts and grows. The plant is different from the seed, but it is a wonderful different that is a blessed thing.

Really the Corinthians are no different than many people living today. There are many people who have doubts about what Jesus has done. They don't really believe that someone who died 2000 years ago can have an impact on their life. They hear about the resurrection and they think that it is a fairy tale that someone could rise from the dead and bring new life to us.

Even this past week as we advertised our Good Friday and Easter Sunday, there were negative things that were said about us as Christians and what Jesus has done for us .

Sadly, although our Savior won this victory over sin, death and the devil for all people, although he suffered to take away the sins of the world, not everyone will take part in that victory. Because of our own sinfulness, rejection and unbelief we could lose the benefits of the victory that Jesus has won for us.

Jesus calls out to the world through his Word, "Repent! Turn from your unbelief to me! He longs to give all people who believe his forgiveness and the victory that he won.

Who is Jesus? Jesus suffered and died on the cross to forgive the sins of the world. That includes your sins and mine. By his suffering and death he won the victory over sin, death and the devil. God placed his stamp of approval on that victory Jesus won, by raising him from the dead. Jesus gives his forgiveness and victory to all who, through the Holy Spirit, believe in him. Jesus is risen, the victory is won. Jesus gives us his victory, we will rise too.