

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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April 23, 2006
2nd Sunday of Easter
1 John 5:1-6
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Acts 3:12-20
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 16
Second Lesson: 1 John 5:1-6
Gospel: John 20:19-31

Faith Overcomes the World

Us against them, us against the world, those kinds of thoughts crop up in our heads from time to time. This time of the year as the NHL and the NBA start their playoffs, you will see some quotes in the paper, if you read the sports section, about how “no one ever thought we would be here,” “everyone was against us,” no one believes in us,” “we don’t pay attention to anyone,” “it’s us against the world.” It’s all a lot of dribble actually when it comes down to it because not that many people in the world really care who wins the playoffs. But, to bolster themselves up, people start thinking that way.

We can start thinking that way at times in our own life. But our God, this morning, reminds us that it is not us against the world because faith overcomes the world. The world has already been defeated. But what exactly does that mean when God tells us that faith overcomes the world. Overcoming the world—what are we talking about? Are we talking about Pinky and the Brain trying to plot the overthrow of the world like you always used to see in those cartoons? Not really.

Why do we need to overcome the world? Why is it against it? Isn’t that what we are born with? Actually, we are born on the side of the world, you and me. We are not born on the side of God. We are born separated from God. When the Bible talks about the world, it is talking about the sinful world, the sinful flesh, and since you and I are born on that side, on the wrong side of God’s equation, we need to get to a place where the world is overcome. The problem is that we love the sinful world and our sinful nature. We don’t want to necessarily overcome the world. That is why it is still a struggle all of our lives even though faith has overcome the world to live in a way that glorifies God. That is why this morning our God reminds us that as we live in the afterglow of the resurrection, faith overcomes the world because it unites us to Christ—the one who has overcome the world in our place. Faith overcomes the world because it does what we are unable to do. It enables us to love as God has loved us and to love because we love God.

We aren’t born with that. We are born separated from God. And the simple nature in us doesn’t want to love as God loves, because God loves by putting the interest of others ahead of his own. We want to love because it is advantageous to us. We want to love because someone has done something to earn our love or our trust or our respect. We don’t want to love those who curse us. We don’t want to love those who hate us. We don’t want to love those who attack us. That is the last thing in the world that we really want to do—love those who despise us, who make our lives miserable, who ridicule us. We want to make their life miserable.

We are reminded this morning that there is something inside of us, we who are Christians, which has changed us. That something is faith that the Spirit, who is the truth, testifies to, the Spirit who put this faith in our hearts. Faith that Jesus has done what you and I couldn't do. Faith that Jesus has overcome the world by living perfectly in our place and then by dying in our place. Faith that Jesus is God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, as we said in our Creed—that he is true God from all eternity. That is one of the things that the apostle John was teaching in his first letter here when we read in 1 John 5.

There was a guy in John's day that was teaching that Jesus was just a man when he was born in Bethlehem and that the Logos, or God, came upon him and became the Messiah at his baptism. But then that Logos, or that divine nature, left him before he was on the cross, and so just a man died on the cross. You might think that is just splitting hairs, but if it isn't God who died for us, then our sins are not paid for because no man can redeem the life of another. In order for Jesus to overcome the world, he has to be true God and true man.

When John tells us the one who overcomes the world is the one who believes in Jesus, the Son of God, and that Jesus is the one who came by water and blood, he is telling us that Jesus is true God from all eternity and true God at his baptism when he came by water and began his public ministry, and true God who died for us when he came by blood, when he shed his blood on the cross to take away our sins. *He did not come by water only, but by water and blood* (1 John 5:6). It says that he was a witness to this truth and he speaks the truth and the Spirit testifies to it that it is the truth. That is how we overcome the world because it unites us to the one who came by water and blood, who lived in our place and then died in our place. We don't overcome the world because we are good or we do good. We don't overcome the world because we try hard. We don't overcome the world because we are better than someone else. We overcome the world because we are connected intimately to Jesus Christ through faith that he is our Savior.

Even that faith, if you notice it says, *everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God* (1 John 5:1)—this reminds us even that faith is not our doing. I don't think any of us here chose our physical birth, did we? That was completely outside of our control. In the same way, our Spiritual birth is outside of our control. We are born of God. God is the one who has given birth to the faith that lives in our hearts. He does that because he loves us intimately and wants us to be with him forever in heaven.

That changes us. It enables us to love as God has loved us. It changes our whole outlook on life. The world would view God's commands, what he says to do and not do, as a burden, as something that takes all the joy out of our lives. And if he wouldn't have said those things and if people wouldn't be telling us those things, there would be a lot more joy in our lives, a lot more happiness. We would be out there having fun like the rest of the world.

The world views Christianity as just a bunch of rules. If we ever fall into that way of thinking, then we are in danger of losing our faith. Our God reminds us that God's

commands are not a burden that weigh us down, but if we understand who God is, that he is love, then we are going to understand when he tells us “do this” or “don’t do that,” he is doing it because he loves us and he knows it isn’t what the devil wants us to believe, fun, to sin in this way, but that it is going to bring sorrow and sadness to our lives.

The world wants us to believe that when God says, “Don’t get drunk because then you are sinning against me,” that the Lord has taken the fun out of your life. It is kind of hard to explain that to the parents of a child who was killed by a drunk driver, isn’t it? “They were just having fun. It’s no big deal.” When God says sex belongs in marriage, not outside of marriage, and we say “that is going to take the fun out of our lives,” it is kind of hard to explain that to the child whose parents are now divorced because of an affair when someone chased after something they thought would be fun.

Faith overcomes the world in the sense that it teaches us to understand that when God tells us something is right or wrong, he does it because he is infinitely wiser than we are first of all, and then he tells it to us because he loves us and he wants us to be blessed. As we love God and show that love for God by how we live, by loving him and putting him first and by loving others unconditionally as God has loved us, there will be joy that will come into our lives. There will be blessings that will come into our lives as part of God’s promise. The closer we walk to God, the more we know God and the more we will be able to face the difficulties that will always come because the sinful world is still here and there will always be sorrow and suffering and grief and pain. It is going to get thrown at us day after day by Satan to see what sticks, what doesn’t fall off or deflect off us. The closer we walk to God, the more we view time with God as a blessing and not a chore that we have to do, the more we will be able to love as God has loved us. We will have joy and confidence and peace and freedom from guilt that the world can never imagine but that it desperately looks for. You and I have that as Christians. It is right there. The Spirit that is living in our heart wants to water it through Word and Sacrament and make it grow and flourish in our lives so that we don’t view sin as something that is enticing, but an affront to our God who loved us so much that he was willing to die for us, that we no longer make excuses for our sins and say, “Well, everyone is doing it” as though now God is going to say, “You know what. You are right. I guess I was wrong. That sin is okay.” We are the created. We are sinners. We are going to tell the sinless holy God, “We know better than you do. You are kind of a fool, God. Let me tell you how it should be.” The arrogance of that is incredible.

Yet, our God still loves us in spite of the arrogance that we show at times. Our God still loves us and washes away our sin through Word and through the Sacraments. He takes us back to our baptism where that water washed away our sins and clothed us with Christ. He takes us by the hand and kneels us at his altar and says, “Here is my body and my blood that takes away your sin.” Our Lord loves us with such an incredible intense love, it is beyond imagining. He does it so that we can love. We show that the love of God lives in us as we love one another. We love, not because we have to, but because we want to. We want to thank God for salvation. We want to be a blessing to others as our fellow believers have been a blessing to us.

None of this is natural. That is why God says, "Faith overcomes the world." Faith overcomes what is not natural for us and enables us to love as we have been loved.