



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

November 19, 2006

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Endtime – Saints Triumphant

Psalm 118:15-24

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Daniel 12:1-3

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 118

Second Lesson: Hebrews 10:11-18

Gospel: John 5:25-29

### **The Victory is Yours**

Commercials say it's the fastest growing network on cable television. That network is the NFL network. One of the things I've noticed about the NFL network is each week they run four games over and over throughout the week. Four games are repeated, replayed over and over. They are the best games they choose from the week and you have a lot of the stuff cut out—in between plays is often cut down, you don't have all of that, and it is kind of interesting at times if you didn't get to see that game to have a chance to sit and watch part of it.

It is kind of interesting when you watch the game the second time isn't it? If one of your favorite teams is playing on the NFL network and you see that game, how does it compare to the first time you watched it? If the first time you watched it your team made critical turnovers, did you throw pillows at the television screen and holler and say, "The coach is an idiot! The quarterback is an idiot! Everyone is an idiot! Why am I not coaching the team?!", and carry on and knock your chips over and spill your drink and act like a complete fool but do it in the name of being a fan?

Of if your team ended up winning the game and you watch it on a replay later that week, does it bother you that much that they made the turnover? Do you get all upset? Do you still throw things around? Do you still act the part of a fool? Or do you think, "I know they have won the victory so it's no big deal anymore"? I have to believe you are not going to make as much of a fuss if it is a replay and you know that your team won the game.

Isn't that exactly what our God told us about in Psalm 118? Didn't he tell us the end result for a Christian? That because Jesus, the Messiah, who is actually speaking through much of this Psalm was not handed over to death, neither will we be. Isn't this our shout of victory in the camp? "*I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done*" (Psalm 118:17). Isn't this our confidence in Christ? We have seen the end result. The scoreboard has flashed. Our team won. Jesus won the victory and heaven is ours and as God has said, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus—except, I suppose, ourselves as we let other things become more important.

We have seen the end result. God now tells us to keep our eyes focused on that victory as we gather together on Saints Triumphant Sunday, we also can join together with the other saints throughout the world and throughout the ages and offer up to God shouts of

joy and victory because this is our confidence in Christ and this is our comfort as we endure life's turnovers and troubles and tragedies.

Psalm 118 you might be a little familiar with because it is also the Psalm that is always appointed for the Festival Service on Easter Sunday. If you have read Psalm 118, the whole first part of the Psalm is the Messiah speaking and he is speaking about his suffering. He is speaking about being attacked. He is speaking about people encircling around him and attacking him. He talks about his suffering. Before the time that I started reading to you, he started saying, "*The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation*" (Psalm 118:14). He starts talking about the victory that God had assured him of and he says this 1000 years before he walks the face of the earth. He talks about the truth of what he would do. He would be the stone that the builders rejected. He would come for his people and his people did not want him. They had better things to do. They had better things to do like focus on themselves. They had better things to do like chase after their prophets in their businesses than to listen to the Messiah when he came to speak to them.

They rejected him, but the Lord made him the capstone—the stone that holds the arch together. If you remove it, the whole arch falls down—that stone right at the middle at the top of an arch. He is the one that holds together our salvation because he lived in our place perfect, he died in our place and the Lord did not hand him over to death. Death did not hold him. The grave didn't hold him. So that is why he could say, "*I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done. The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death*" (Psalm 118:17, 18). Because of that confidence that he had, he said, "*Open for me the gates of righteousness*" (Psalm 118:19).

Then he changes from "gates" to "*This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter*" (Psalm 118:20). The Messiah is there speaking of himself. Jesus certainly applied these words to himself when he talked in John 11 about the Good Shepherd. He also talked about "I am the gate. No one comes in through God's sheep pen except through me." Through faith in Jesus that he lived in our place and died in our place, we know the end result of the struggle that goes on between us and the devil and the world and our flesh. We know that Jesus has completely and absolutely won the victory. There is no doubt about it. There is no uncertainty. There are no "what ifs." It is the most glorious truth that one person can every share with another that heaven is open to you through the life and death of Jesus Christ. It is the most glorious truth that we can ever have bounce off of our eardrums.

Yet, at times, are we kind of like the Israelites? We have better things to do. We have more important things to do. We have our money invested in things and we have to take advantage of it. We don't have time for God and his stuff. Are there times that we take this glorious truth and relegate it to something less than the importance it deserves? Certainly we do. And because of that, we should have no standing before God because we have not kept his will for us perfectly. If our confidence was going to be in ourselves, in what we have done, we would have no confidence. I guarantee you that you have sinned since you sat down in the pew this morning. God says, "love my Word above all else." As you heard the Confession and Absolution, did you have your

eyes wander or wonder why we are doing it this way? Or did you rejoice in the truth of the words? Did you look around to see who is here, to see who is coming in late, who is sitting where and who is wearing what? Has your mind wandered since you heard any one of the readings this morning? Has your mind wandered since I stepped into the pulpit? Have we always loved that Word fully and completely and given it the priority in our lives it deserves? Absolutely, positively not!

Yet, for you and I shouts of victory can still resound in the tents that we dwell in because we are righteous, not by what we have done, but by what Jesus Christ has done for us. Because of that truth, that is why we are comforted when one we love dies knowing that Jesus is their Savior—because while we might remember them as good people and wonderful people, their goodness and their wonderfulness did not open the gates of heaven to them. Only Jesus Christ did. If our confidence was in their goodness, our goodness or anyone's goodness, we would have no confidence. But our confidence is that Jesus is the gate through which we enter. Our confidence is that he won the victory. This is God's commitment to us. In spite of how flimsy and frail our commitments are to God, God has made the commitment to us—"I have taken away every last one of your sins. Heaven is open to you. Here is the end of the game. Here is the end result. You win! Heaven is yours!" That truth, in spite of our unfaithfulness, in spite of our pettiness as we talked about this morning in our Bible study of how petty we often become in neglecting this together of Christ that we have—how we often get focused on such small, insignificant things because we don't do what God has told us to do. He has said *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace* (Ephesians 4:3). Make every effort to use the bond of peace which is the gospel. We don't make every effort to do it and therefore we don't have the comfort our God would always have us have. We make every effort to do a lot of other things and in so doing, we cheat ourselves because God has told us that we too can say, *"I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done"* (Psalm 118:17). We have that privilege to share it with one another for each other's comfort and we so often let that glorious truth slip to the side.

If our confidence was based on our commitment to God, we would have absolutely none. But God has made this commitment. He loves us in spite of our sins. He loves us and forgives our sins. When we recognize just how sinful we are and how much our God has forgiven us and how important this victory is, then we desire to serve him. Then we want to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Then we want to do the things that God tells us are a blessing to us, including making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. It becomes a priority for us to grow in our faith in the fruits of faith and to put others interests ahead of our own. That is how we show them comfort. We put their interests first and share the gospel with them when they are hurting. Share the gospel with them when they are troubled. Share the gospel, to good news of Jesus, with them when their hearts are broken, because we also need that.

We share it with ourselves so that we can comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received from God and we need others to share it with us because there are times that we are broken and sad and hurt and filled with grief and we need that reminder—

don't focus on just this hurt now, but focus on the truth that God has won the victory and heaven is yours. In so doing, we find our comfort.

Today many will make their commitment to this capital appeal, but let's not ever kid ourselves into thinking that our commitments are anything compared to the commitment that God has made to us in Christ Jesus. Rejoice in what he has done for you and then live with shouts of joy in victory even in the dark days because you know the end result—heaven is yours, through Jesus.