

“Jesus Wins!”

People are usually surprised to hear about the language requirements for seminary students. Actually, only Presbyterians are still required to study the ancient Hebrew and Greek. When I am asked why, I have a hard time answering this question because, as you have heard me say before, Hebrew almost turned me into a Methodist! And as a student, I was always lamenting to my professors the unfairness of the whole curriculum and offering any reasons that I could that might end this terrible persecution.

One semester, the New Testament professor was going to be teaching a class on the book of Revelation. I mentioned casually to the Dean of Erskine Seminary that I sure would love to take the class but couldn't because my schedule was all filled up with those awful language classes but it was to no avail. He assured me that I wouldn't be missing a thing and said, “You can sum up the whole book in two words – JESUS WINS!”

Each Sunday, when we repeat the Apostles' Creed, we affirm that on the third day after his death Jesus was raised and ultimately went to sit on the right hand of our Father in Heaven. And that means that when we say, “From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead”, it is really another way of saying “Jesus Wins!”

Those two words are very descriptive and certainly easier to interpret than the visions, dreams and symbolism that John offers us in his Revelation, given to him while he was in exile on the island of Patmos. In fact, I think that most of us are so busy trying to figure out all the “stuff” of Revelation, that we may well miss the point, which is that

Jesus wins. William Barclay calls the book the “playground of the religious eccentrics” and that is understandable.

But today, as we celebrate Christ the King Sunday, I would like us to consider what WE win when we realize that Jesus is victorious. John wants us to understand basically that, by the grace that God has given us through the life, death and resurrection of His Son, we no longer have to fear the grave. So let’s think about what this grace means to us and how it makes us winners.

First, God wants us to understand who He is. He identifies himself to John as the one who is and who was and who is to come and later identifies Jesus with the same idea, calling him the Alpha and Omega, or beginning and end in the Greek alphabet. This is actually the same thing that God said to Moses when he asked, “When I go to the people to deliver them from Egypt, who should I say sent me?” Our modern day Bibles say that God replied, “I AM” sent you. The ancient Hebrew actually reads “I am who I am and I was who I was and I will be who I will be” sent you! What a rich interpretation for us to consider. Now I guess we can all be glad that I was forced to stick it out in those language classes?

In other words, God is saying that the God of all time, space and peoples is the one who offers us victory! His grace covers everything that has happened, is happening or will happen! What a gift to know that there is nothing that we face today or will ever HAVE to face that God has not already been victorious over, in Jesus Christ.

So, knowing this, I will say that the first gift of God’s grace is peace. God is unchanging. His love is constant. And in a world that lives with internal and external conflicts of every kind, finding something that is constant is like coming across an oasis

of peace in a desert of turmoil. It is the reminder of the promise of living water for thirsty lives.

The next gift that God's grace offers us is the gift of hope. This is a word that we use so freely that I'm not sure we stop to consider what it really means. Hope is not a wish. It is not a rabbit's foot in our pocket or our lucky shirt at the soccer game or expecting to win the lottery. It is an assurance, a firm and binding promise. It is a sure thing. Hope is not a feeling – a sensation in our gut that our team will win the game. Hope is rooted in the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and the assurance of God's unshakeable love for His people.

Hope is independent of our circumstances – the odds of our horse winning the Kentucky derby or what kind of weather we have to cope with. So think of it this way - hope will never be conquered by events. What an awesome truth to hang our hearts on!

So when we combine the peace that God offers us with the promise of His unchanging love and the hope that is given to us in the historical fact of Christ's resurrection then grace means to me **THAT WHAT EVER IS OVER OUR HEADS IS ALREADY UNDER CHRIST'S FEET!** Even if hurt seems to be winning the battle, even if illness seems to be the focus of the hour, even if warfare prevails throughout the world, Christ is still the King over all things. Jesus wins!

But perhaps the most important gift of God's grace is the promise of His presence. When I was serving as the Chaplain of the Presbyterian Community, I dealt with a lot of death. And truly it is a real privilege to be with a family and their loved one while they take that step from one Kingdom to the next. When I look back over my ministry, one memory I have of sensing God's presence is of being with a special

ninety-four year old saint who had lived through many trials and triumphs was struggling with the effects of a broken hip and pneumonia. Because her lungs were so filled with fluid, I had been told before I went in to see her that she was not allowed to drink anything but would probably ask me for something. Sure enough, after a while she said to me – “I want water so badly.”

While I was trying to think of something that I could say that would comfort her, a peaceful smile came across her face and she said, “I thirst – just like Jesus! That’s what he said on the cross”. And so while I was supposed to be ministering to Mary, she ministered to me, reminding me that she knew that Christ understood fully her anguish. And God's presence, which was so real to her, then became real to me, as I felt wrapped in the love of his grace. Knowing that God has experienced all of life for us, even to the point of death, assures us of His constant presence with us.

But still, the greatest gift of God’s grace is truly His victory over death and that is the primary emphasis of our text today. As one who had witnessed the resurrection, John understood the Revelation from God to be a reminder that we can choose grace over the grave. That by God’s gifts in this life we can all live with the promise of an even better life that is to come.

One of the reasons that I chose the last hymn that we will sing is because of the words: "*Life* shall not end the strain. On Heaven's blissful shore his goodness we'll adore, singing forever more, Alleluia! Amen!" These are words of triumph that Jesus judges "the quick and the dead," that is to say, those who are alive and those are have joined him in Heaven. Indeed, Jesus wins!

And as I wrote, I thought of the words from the Gospel of John that we heard earlier. When coupled with his words from his Revelation, John reminds us that these gifts of grace and victory are given to us with a responsibility. That is, we are called NOT just to enjoy Jesus' victorious position, but to show others WHAT OUR LIVES LOOK LIKE because of HIS victory.

John tells us that we have to speak and live and react in a way that reflects this priceless grace that we have received. After all, if we want others to have what we have been given by God through Christ, then it is our job to make the Christian life an attractive one! This not only means living in a way that demonstrates Christ's command to love one another, but also to show how our lives are different because we also live with the gifts of peace and hope as well.

I can honestly say that I know many people who are "Christ like" in their behavior even though they are Jewish or Muslim or practice no religion at all. But knowing that Jesus' victory gives me not only eternal life but peace and hope in *this* life, calls my life to be different from those who do not claim these gifts as their own.

I read a story once that illustrates beautifully the peace, hope and presence that we receive when we celebrate the victory of Jesus. A man and women were coming home from a conference, traveling across the Rocky Mountains from Fort Collins, Colorado. As they rounded a mountainous curve, they witnessed a serious motorcycle accident. The driver, who was without a helmet, was thrown fifty feet or so from the bike and lay bleeding.

The two stopped and as the man called for help and then directed traffic around the victim, the woman knelt next to the unconscious man, stroking his hair and talking to him.

When the ambulance came and whisked the driver away, the traveling companions got back in their car and began to drive in silence.

After a while, the man said, “I saw you talking to that young man. He was obviously unconscious. He may have even been dead. What could you possibly have been saying to him?” She replied, “I just told him over and over again that the worst was over. That the healing has already begun.”

Minister Genie Gamble says: “To those long ago hurting ones to whom John wrote, to those long ago ones whose lives were marked by fear and pain, by weakness and oppression of injustice and death, whose lives were marked by terror of the now and haunted by the past and fearful of the uncertain future, to those ones and to us, to you, God through the words of Revelation offers us a vision of a brand new life; a life lived in a brand new order in a brand new way.”

Her words are a powerful reminder to us today that no matter what comes against you and me in this life; even when all of the power of pain and the chaos of the universe seems stronger than anything you can withstand; when you cannot control one thing or fix one single thing in your life; remember that the worst is over, and that the healing began over 2000 years ago on the cross of Calvary. By God’s grace over the grave, Christ is King! Jesus wins! And so do we. Amen.

The Rev. Julie Schaaf
Nazareth Presbyterian Church, Nov. 26th, 2017

Oh Jesus, You are the King of Glory, You are the Lord of Lords, and King of Kings. And we pray that your Kingdom will reign forever in our hearts and in this world.

Lord, we pray for your Kingdom to come here now, bringing a kingdom of justice, righteousness, hope, love, peace, mercy and grace for all. We ask that you rule in our hearts, lead in this world and govern over your kingdom.

But Lord honestly, we often have our own plans and agendas and we want to be rulers of our world. Forgive us for those times. Help us to know how to live as your Kingdom People in these times. We know that there are a lot of Kings in this world who terrorize, over tax, humiliate, over exploit, and abuse those they are to lead. Help us to spread the good news of the different kind of King you are.

Jesus our Savior, thank you for being a different kind of King. Thank you for your goodness and kindness in our lives. Thank you for your generosity. and for loving us just as we are. Help us love others in your name, especially those who are hurting, lonely, or grieving. Show us how to share the light of your kingdom so that the oppressed, the imprisoned, the addicted, the abused may have the hope that we do. Thank you for your Kingdom that is unlike any Kingdom in this world. We pray in your holy name. Amen.

Offertory prayer

Glorious God, you are the Lord of resurrection power! You raised your Son Jesus from death to live and rule at the right hand of your heavenly throne. We rejoice that you uphold the universe, and yet you treasure every person's life. Send your Spirit to shine your light so we will recognize your great hope for the world. Empower our church to work together to help make your

reign visible in people's lives. Accept our gifts and offerings for the church of Jesus Christ, our Savior. We pray in his name. Amen.