

Sermon for Easter Day: Victory!

Silvia Purdie, Cashmere Presbyterian Church Easter 2016

Bible Readings

Psalm 18, verses 1-7, 16-20, 46-50

Matthew 28:1-10

Victory

We all want to win, right! Right?

I don't know ... I was brought up to cheer for the underdog. When the winning team was high-5-ing each other and punching the air with their fists, my natural instincts are to feel sorry for the losers. To be perfectly honest, I'm suspicious of winning, wary of self-proclaimed victors.

So I come a little hesitantly to the Biblical claim that God gives victory to his chosen people ... when the winning team gives God the thanks and honour for the victory, does that mean God took sides?

But, Christ who died is risen, victorious ... now that is a victory I want to celebrate wholeheartedly. That is a victory I want to be part of!

The hymn writers invite us in ...

Here's one from the 16th century:

Most glorious Lord of live, that on this day
Didst make thy triumph over death and sin
And, having harrowed hell, didst bring away
Captivity thence captive, us to win

This one is even older, translated from the Latin:

The strife is over, the battle done
Now is the victor's triumph won!
O let the song of praise be sung – Alleluia!
Death's mightiest powers have done their worst
And Jesus hath his foes dispersed
Let shouts of praise and joy outburst – Alleluia!

Our Psalm for Easter Day is 18. It concludes with these verses

The LORD lives! Blessed be my rock,

and exalted be the God of my salvation,

⁴⁷ the God who gave me victory

and subdued peoples under me;

⁴⁸ who saved me from my enemies;
indeed, you raise me above my foes;
you delivered me from the violent.

⁴⁹ For this I will extol you, O LORD, among the nations,
and sing praises to your name.

⁵⁰ Great triumphs he gives to his king,
and shows steadfast love to his anointed,
to David and his descendants forever.

I puzzle with this, even as I rejoice in it. I puzzle about this victory, won by Christ for us. If we have the victory, whom or what is defeated? If Christ is victorious, what difference does this make for us on all the other days of the year? How can we claim victory when bombs still fall and teenagers choose death over life?

I made a good friend back in my seminary days. One Shirley Guthrie, and I turn to him when I puzzle over theology: He has been discussing the reality of what is wrong with the world, the 'problem of evil', and he gets to Easter:

Shirley Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, p.182-183

"Christ is the victim of evil, but also the victor over evil."

Easter is not a superhero movie in which Jesus blasts all the bad guys, claims the kingdom, and everyone lives happily ever after ... and they you emerge from the movie theatre blinking in the harsh daylight and nothing has changed in the real world.

Easter fundamentally changed the nature of reality. The death and resurrection of Jesus opened space in the very structures of time and space, heaven and earth, space held open for eternity, in which love wins, in which goodness is victorious. It is an open space in which you can trust the air you breathe, where you can trust the ground you stand on. It is common ground for people of every tribe and tongue to speak the language of love. It is safe space in which children and young people and old people can know how precious they are. It is a teaching place where we learn how to stand tall and stand strong against the powers of evil, not as victims or aggressors but sharing in the victory of

Jesus. This resurrection space Jesus called the Kingdom of God. It is our one reason for being as a church.

And we still wish, as Jesus' disciples did 2000 years ago, that he would invade the world and put everything to rights. But instead of world domination, victory comes in the form of a person, a living, loving person, whom we know as Jesus Christ, Messiah and Lord, Son of God. And victory looks like small acts of love, small ways in which God touches the world through us, small acts of defiance against the darkness. And Jesus still says to us, as he did to the women who met him risen from the tomb, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell."