

1 May 2016
Easter 6

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“I Have Overcome the World”

Text: John 16:23-33; Revelation 21:9-14, 21-27; Acts 16:9-15

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

I have overcome the world, Jesus says. Yet even as He was speaking those words, Judas and the band of soldiers he had been given were marching out of Jerusalem in search of Jesus to arrest Him and then, ultimately, put Him up on the cross. *So how could Jesus speak these words?* When it seems not like He was overcoming the world, but that the world was about to overcome Him.

But Jesus said that, too. *In the world you will have tribulation*, He said. He did and was about to. And so would His disciples. And you. There is no shortage of trials and distress, troubles and pressures in this world and life. Satan may be a defeated foe, but he is still going to try to make himself look successful and strong and someone to be feared. So Jesus tells us these things, He says, ***that we may have peace***. Peace of heart, peace of mind, even in the midst of a troubled and turbulent world. For He has ***overcome the world***.

And notice: that statement is in the past tense. He's saying that He's already done it; it's already over. And certainly some things were. Jesus had overcome the diseases of this world with His healing, the demons of this world with His exorcism, the physical losses of this world with His restoration, and the sin of this world with His forgiveness. He had overcome much. But still, He was not done yet. He still faced the last and greatest enemy of all: **death and the grave**.

But still He speaks in the past tense - ***I have overcome the world*** - as if He has already done it. Because, as I say often in my Bible classes, when Jesus makes a promise, it is as good as done. Jesus speaks of the future as if it has already happened. Because it will. 100% guaranteed. The future for Him is more certain than the past is for us. For even when we think we know the past, more information or different facts often are discovered which make us reassess. But not Jesus. The One who knows all knows the future just as

completely as He knows the past. And so His promise for the future is as good as done. If He said it, it is so.

The disciples, of course, would still have to learn that. The next three days would sorely try them and their faith. But when Jesus rose from the dead, they would learn. Death could not win. The grave could not win. Jesus had overcome the world. There is nothing in this world that is not under His feet. Nothing.

And that's something we need to learn as well. Whether it's three days, three months, three years, or even longer, there are times in our lives that sorely try and test our faith as well and make us disbelieve our Lord and His Word and promises. When it seems like the world is overcoming us; when it seems like the world is overcoming the Church and the Word of God. When it seems like God is losing. False religions and their false gods continue to grow and church attendance - at least in the West - continues to decline. The objective morality of the Bible continues to be replaced with morality-by-popular-vote, which isn't very moral at all. And any mention of Jesus in the public square, in public life, is strictly *verboten*. ***Take heart; I have overcome the world*** seems as much wishful thinking today as when the disciples witnessed Jesus being hauled away and executed.

And yet it is as true for us today as it was back in the day of the disciples. The reading from Revelation gives us a glimpse of that reality. The Church, the Bride of Christ, is not defeated, but beautiful and radiant. The Lamb is on His throne, victorious. The apostles' names are on the foundation of the holy city - upon their Word and witness the Church was, in fact, built. And though they did experience much tribulation, even to the point of martyrdom, *they could not be overcome*. They suffered, yet rejoiced. They were killed, yet lived. They were hated, yet loved those who hated them. They were scorned, yet prayed for those who scorned them.

How could they do that but for the fact that the victory was already theirs? And they knew it. And so victorious, having been given everything, they could live in that confidence and victory. Nothing could overcome them in Jesus. Nothing. He had overcome the world.

And that's why Jesus spoke the words that He did about prayer. ***Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.*** Sometimes people hear those words and think that God has to give them a new car, or lots of money, or healing, or a good grade on a test, or whatever they want and pray for, as long as they say "in Jesus name" at the end of the prayer. But asking for those things like that is really asking in my name, not Jesus' name. They are the things of *my* heart, *my* mind, *my* wants, *my* wishes, *my* desires, *my* hopes - not Jesus'. And while God *may* give those things, that's not really what these words are about or what they mean.

Rather, they go together with Jesus' word that *He has overcome the world*. For if He has

overcome the world, then there is nothing that can stop our prayer from coming to the Father, and nothing that can stop God from giving us everything. Satan is defeated, so he cannot stop it. Our sin no longer separates us from God, so that cannot stop it either. So pray, ask, Jesus says. Not because His name is like a magic wand, but because bearing His Name, we can pray to God *as dear children ask their dear father* [Small Catechism]. A Father who *wants* to provide.

And perhaps Lydia is an example of that for us today, as we heard her story in the first reading. She was praying. And while we're not told what she was praying for, it seems like God answered her prayers by sending Paul to her, to preach to her and baptize her and her family. To the world, it doesn't seem as if Lydia was anyone special, to have her prayer heard and answered in such a way. But she was very special to her Father in heaven; our Father who wants to provide. So He provided for Lydia, and He provides for you.

And what He wants to give you most of all is *joy* and *peace*. Not only here and now, in this world and life, but forever. The joy and peace of Jesus, of His forgiveness, and of knowing that He has overcome the world. We heard that from Jesus today: *Ask . . . that your joy may be full*; and, *I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace*. Satan wants to rob us of that joy and peace and give us only sorrow and despair, distress and disbelief.

But as we sang in the Introit this morning, cast all that on the Lord - ***Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.***

So cast the burden of the sorrow, despair, and distress of your sin here and hear His Word of Absolution: *I forgive you all your sin. I paid for it all on the cross; there's no debt left for you. **I have overcome the world.***

Cast the burden of the trials, troubles, and doubt of your life into the water of the font, that they be drowned in Christ there, and hear His Word of adoption: *You are mine; my son, my daughter. I baptized you into me; you are mine. **I have overcome the world.***

And cast the burden of the weariness, struggles, and disappointments of your failure, your shortcomings, all your crap-I-did-it-again weakness here at His altar, and hear His Word of assurance: *I took all that to the cross. It's gone. Dead and buried. Here is the new life that you need, and the forgiveness and strength you need; here, in My Body and Blood. Take, eat, and drink. **I have overcome the world.***

So ask for His gifts. Ask for his help. Ask for His strength. Ask for Jesus to fulfill his Word. Ask that you be made new. Ask for the confidence, joy, and peace you need. *Ask*, Jesus says, ***and you will receive***. For when Jesus makes a promise, He will deliver.

And when you have all that, the joy and peace of Christ, His Word and promises, and the assurance that He has overcome the world, you are truly and extraordinarily blessed. Even without the new car, good grades, or facing health crises. Even in the midst of a world gone mad. Even when the crosses laid upon you seem to much to bear. You are not alone. You are in Christ and Christ is in you. Which means that not only has Christ overcome the world, but in Him, really and truly, already now, **so have you.**

For Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*]

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.