



More Than Conquerors...

In Romans 8, in one of the most stirring statements of hope in all human literature, the apostle Paul reminds us of where we stand. In Jesus Christ, we stand in God's love. No matter what may happen—hardship, persecution, famine, disease, nakedness or death—we who have placed our life and faith into Jesus Christ have nothing to really fear. Paul says that we are *hypernikao* (ὑπερνικῶμεν). It is a very rare word in Greek. It takes the original idea of *nikao*—to be completely victorious (think Nike which means victory) or triumphant—and adds *hyper*. *Hyper* is a superlative. It means above and beyond, over the top. Whatever “above and beyond complete victory and triumph” means, Paul says that is what we are in Jesus Christ. The NIV and ESV translate the word *hypernikao* as “more than conquerors.” This is a fine way to render it, but it lacks the punch that would have been felt by his original hearers. This was a word intended to encourage the heart that is fretting, strengthen the will that is crumbling, and firm up knees that are wobbling. Regardless of how the battle looks at this moment, regardless of how terrifying the enemy may seem, Jesus is our champion. We take our stand in Him.

So this coming Sunday, we are going to be celebrating Palm Sunday. On this day, we remember Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a young donkey. It was a symbolic act where Jesus declared He was the True King who comes in peace. The crowds came and cheered. For a moment, it looked as if everything was going to go from victory to victory. But the way of Jesus conquering is through crucifixion—death on a cross.

In this world, in this age of existence marked by sin and death, victory is our hope not always our present experience. It often appears like we are defeated. The old order of things, however, is passing away. Jesus has been resurrected from the dead. We don't just see a cross, but we see the cross through the empty tomb. We also see the cross through the Lord's Supper.

Right now, as we are all hunkered down, trying to promote safety and welfare in the face of COVID-19, it doesn't seem like we are winning. The death toll is rising. At this point, we are hoping and praying that the death toll is only 100,000 Americans and not 200,000. This, of course, is a lot better than estimates just a few weeks ago. But it doesn't feel like victory.

But we are in Jesus Christ. We are *hypernikao*—above and beyond absolute and complete victory and triumph. It has not been realized, but it is true nonetheless. This Sunday, we are going to gather for Worship at 9:45 am on Facebook Live. The service can be viewed later on our website. Regardless of the challenge and despite the physical distance, we are going to worship.



It is also the first Sunday of the month. In our tradition, this means celebrating the victory of Christ by gathering around His table and celebrating communion. While

it is not ideal and to quote our office manager Caryn Combs, “COVID-19 can't stop us from being the Church.” The leadership of the church have decided that we are going to celebrate the Lord's Table under a special dispensation. We want to invite every household to have elements that we can take together as we worship in our homes across the Tri-Cities and beyond. Ideally, you will have some bread and grape juice/wine. If you can't find either grape juice or wine, then we suggest fruit juice; and if no juice, just use water. The power of communion is not in the elements but in the one who promises that through this meal he will do for us just what the elements signify. He is going to nourish our souls with His life and grace through the power of the Holy Spirit. When we celebrate at the table, I will lead us in breaking the bread and offering the cup. As you distribute the bread and the cup, consider health factors. If someone is sick, use separate cups; otherwise in your family, you could dip the bread into a single cup. If there are more than one of you, then I encourage you to speak Christ's words to one another. When you give the bread to another, say, “This is Christ's body broken for you.” Likewise, when you hold the cup or give the cup, say, “This is Christ's blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins.”

I was really struck by the reminder of last week's Scripture. The knowledge of the truth comes through obedience to Jesus. We should come with expectation on Sunday morning. We are choosing to worship. We are going to be gathering around the Lord's Table, physically distant, but spiritually one body of Christ united with Christians around the world. The Lord wants to bless us, feed us, and find our life and nourishment in Him.

Why? Because in Him we are *hypernikao*—above and beyond absolute and complete victory and triumph because we stand in the love of God given to us in Jesus Christ.

Blessings in Christ, Pastor Ralph