

*I have set the LORD always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.*

⁹ *Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,*
¹⁰ *because you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*
¹¹ *You have made known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Psalm 16:8-11)*

What Jesus Won, We Won

I just finished reading a book about the way that people who lived through it remembered the Civil War. There was a big difference between the way people in the north and the south remembered it, for several reasons. In the south, between 75 and 85% of the eligible white men served in the army. In the north, just under 50% of the eligible white men served. The armies fought in the south, so women and children saw the war, and many had to flee. But for women and children in the north, the war was far away. In the south, the naval blockade caused massive shortages of food and clothing. In the north, people's lives were relatively unaffected. Of course, the south didn't use black soldiers but the north eventually did.

All this led to very different ways of remembering the war. In general, southern white women were very pro-Confederate even decades after the war. "The cause" was their cause. They lost when the armies lost. Northern women didn't have the same level of connection and they were often treated like they weren't important for the war effort. But the truth is, the union cause was their cause, too. Those were their armies on the field, fighting for their country. Their husbands and fathers and brothers were bleeding and dying. On both sides, the home front won and lost when the soldiers won and lost. Why am I talking about that today? This morning, we want to remember another war that we won. But we weren't there on the battlefield. We were the home front, the people whose lives and futures depended on how that war came out. The war, of course, is the battle that Jesus fought against sin and death and hell on the cross. **What Jesus won, we won.**

I.

Jesus won when he rose from the dead. Psalm 16 is all about that resurrection. It was written by King David a thousand years before Jesus was born. But we heard in our reading from Acts today how this psalm connects to Jesus. The Acts reading comes from the day of Pentecost. Three times a year, every Jewish male was supposed to appear at God's sanctuary. Pentecost was one of those days. Jewish people came from all over the known world to celebrate at Jerusalem. On the day of this particular festival, there was the sound of a great rushing wind. Then tongues of fire came to rest on the apostles. They began to speak in languages that they had never heard. The people heard the wonders of God proclaimed in their own languages. But some people had to mock God's wonders. They said that the apostles were drunk, probably because they overheard them speaking to people in some language they didn't understand and they dismissed that as gibberish. That's when Peter got up and preached one of the most memorable sermons in the Bible. God used it to convert three thousand people. In the course of that sermon, Peter quoted our text for this morning. He pointed out that it means that someone beat death. But it wasn't King David. He was definitely dead. So who was it? Jesus. He conquered death when he rose.

A thousand years before it happened, Jesus told us what his victory meant for him. He said, "**I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.**" What does it mean that he set the LORD always before him? It's an expression of commitment. It's making your faith the heart of your life. Sadly, not every believer is serious about growing in his or her faith. Not every believer changes his world view so that he see things the way God sees them. Not every believer applies God's promises to all the challenges that he or she faces. But God calls all of us to be that kind of believer. Jesus was. He was perfect in

his faith. Now remember, Jesus was a real human being. He was born. He grew up. He learned and developed, physically and emotionally and mentally. All while he was also God who never changes and who knows everything and can do everything. The human part of Jesus needed food and clothing and love and friendship, just like we do. And the human side of Jesus needed faith. It needed to know that God was there for him. It needed to find strength and comfort in all that God does for us. All his life, Jesus had that kind of faith. He set the LORD always before him. Jesus trusted absolutely in his Father. The result was simple. He said, "I will not be shaken."

What would that be like? What would it be like to hear bad news and not have your heart flutter in fear? What it would be like to lose your job, to be attacked, to be sick or to lose people you love and your faith never misses a beat? Jesus' faith was like that. Now, Jesus did feel the hurt that goes with all those things. Not long before he went to the cross, his good friend Lazarus died. Jesus went to raise him from the dead. When he got to his home and Lazarus' two sisters, Mary and Martha poured out their sorrow and loss, do you remember what Jesus did? He wept. The Bible says that he was deeply moved. Jesus knew he was going to raise Lazarus in just a couple of minutes, but still death hurt. But Jesus was not shaken. He told Martha that he was the resurrection and life. He promised both sisters that they would see the glory of God. He prayed and acknowledged in that prayer that he knew that God always heard him. And then he said, "Lazarus, come forth!"

Every day of his life here, Jesus faced the hurts and sorrows we face. In his ministry, he faced the opposition and persecution we face. On the cross, he faced death and endured hell and unbelievable physical torture. And his faith was unshaken. He finally committed his spirit into God's hands and died. That perfect faith counts for you and me. How do we react to the things Jesus faced? So often, we question God's love and care. We ache and we don't know how to stop. Sometimes, we wallow in sin and self-pity and unbelief. When we face fear, when we face hurt, when we face persecution, all too often our faith just doesn't live up to the standard that Jesus' faith set. So often we are unworthy of his love.

But Jesus wasn't just an example. Jesus was perfect in his faith in our place. So now, every time we face hurt and sorrow and we tremble and whine and run away, God sees Jesus facing it all in perfect trust. And he calls us perfect. And God sees Jesus going to that cross and enduring that hell and that death and paying for all our weakness and whining and fear and flight. God sees Jesus' blood washing all that sin away. And then God raised Jesus to say that what he saw was enough. It pays for all our sin. You don't need anything else. God has forgiven you because of Jesus.

Jesus knew all that was going to happen. He knew that God would not abandon him to the grave. He knew that God would not let the one holy person who has ever lived stay dead. So every day of his life, he rested secure in God's love. He was never shaken. That's what Jesus won. And **what Jesus won, we won. Jesus won perfect security.** Do you see the point, my friends? Because God did not leave Jesus dead in that tomb, he's not going to leave us alone to face the hardships and hurts of this life. Just like he conquered death, he can heal any problem we face. No matter how bad it gets here, we have a better life coming. And that promise of forgiveness and eternal life means that God reaches into our hearts and gives us the faith that can face real life. God makes us new and strong and he does it over and over again every day that we live here. God changes us from the kind of Christians who don't take their faith seriously into the kind of Christians who live for their Lord. God enables us to be secure in the face of everything that hurts, everything that's scary, everything that challenges us. We will not be shaken, because our risen Christ has won and he is with us. Set Christ before you and let him work in your heart. Set Christ before you and grow in your faith. Set Christ always before you. The blessings that come from love are endless.

II.

Because Jesus rose from the dead, everything that happens to us in this life is a blessing, even the things that hurt. They all work to bring us home to heaven. They all work to refine our trust in Jesus. But they are all based on a promise. Because it's a promise, we don't see the fulfillment yet. While Jesus walked this earth, he experienced the same reality we do: hurt and sorrow and the promise of a new and better life. His resurrection is God's way of saying that promise will come true.

A couple of weeks ago, my son took his ACT. I haven't seen the results yet. He's a pretty good student, so I'm not worried. But I hope he did so well that colleges crawl all over themselves begging him to come and waving money at him. But I don't know if that's going to happen. Even if it does, all I can do is hope that he has a good experience and that he makes the most of it. All I can do is hope that it leads to a good job and to

meeting a Christian spouse and to a life of contentment in God's love. But I can't see the future. It's possible that he has a much harder road ahead of him. It's possible that he'll reach heaven before I do. I don't know.

Our hope in Christ is not like that. There is a lot that I don't know about it. But it isn't doubtful. Jesus said, **"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."** Now, he was talking about himself. God revealed the path of life to Jesus after his body had died. In other words, God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. And now Jesus no longer faces the hurts and sorrows we face. He's in heaven. He has a kind of joy that you and I can't really even imagine. A perfect joy, a joy that is never touched by sorrow. A joy that lasts forever. Jesus has eternal pleasures at God's right hand.

Maybe being with people we love is the closest we can get to understanding the joy of heaven. When I was growing up, my mom had this keepsake book of various things from when she was younger. One day I was looking through it and I found a telegram from my dad to my mom. He was still in the army then and she had spent a year at her parents' home with me and my brother while he was stationed in Turkey. My sister was born while he was overseas. The telegram said when he would get home. It finished with the words "Love, Edward." Now, my dad is not a very expressive man. He loves us, but he doesn't say it much. So that telegram struck me because you could see how much he looked forward to being with his wife and children after that long separation. We look forward to being with people we love. For Jesus, the greatest blessing of ascending into heaven was being with his Father. That filled him with eternal pleasure.

What Jesus won, we won. Jesus won eternal joy. We will be with the one who loved us and died for us. We will be with the Father who planned all things so that we can be with him. We will be with the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts and renews our faith. We will have that perfect fellowship with them forever. And we'll have perfect fellowship with all believers. All the things that divide our churches here, all the things that we need to forgive each other here – all those things will be gone forever. And we will live in perfect love with each other forever.

It goes without saying that our hearts will be perfect. No fear. No sorrow. And no sin to mess it all up. My friends, how great will that be? How many times have we wanted to do better and we didn't? How many times have we wished could just turn the clock back and not say or do or think what we did? In heaven, all that bad history will be gone. And we'll never sin again because our hearts will truly be perfect. And so will our bodies and so will our world. We will live in joy with Jesus forever.

What Jesus won, we won. He fought the greatest battle of all: the battle against sin and death and hell and he won. He defeated the devil who owned us and he set us free. He took away our sin and made us his. We will live with him forever. Rejoice in that victory. Be at peace in that victory. And yes, share that victory with each other and the world. Amen.