

Sermon - May 6, 2018 - Easter 6

“Overwhelmed or Overcoming?”

1 John 5:1–8



Dear Friends in Christ

What a beautiful day is today. There is a sense or renewing as the snow is melted, the pools of water have dried up, green begins to be seen all over. But on this beautiful day, let me ask you a question, how would you say you feel today, overwhelmed or overcoming?

Imagine how Jesus disciples must have felt back then, I'm sure they were overwhelmed from time to time, especially as they were called to be preachers and teachers of the faith who would turn the world upside down. I'm sure their overwhelming was positive and also negative. On the one hand I'm sure they were positively overwhelmed by Jesus' resurrection and ascension, and by also Jesus's miracles they witnessed before and after the ascension.

But I'm also sure that they were negatively overwhelmed by what appeared to be bad times as well. Remember when they were at sea in the storm, convinced the boat was going to capsize, they were overwhelmed. How about Jesus trial, crucifixion and burial? No wonder they hid that week after the resurrection, overwhelmed by fear.

As one who knew that kind of overwhelming, the apostle John writes to his "little children" at Ephesus in today's epistle reading, that they and us too, that we would not be overwhelmed by the world, instead, overcome it.

But what is this "world" that we have to overcome? By "the world" John refers to all that surrounds us including our own selves and what we face each day. I mean our trials and sufferings along with all its temptations.

But and primarily to all that has to do with faith and what the world does in regards to faith. Really all centers around faith and religion, did you know that? Let me explain. When we talk about religion the first thing we think of is an organized group that focuses on some religion, right? We think of religion as a "a particular system of faith and worship." But in the origin of the word it means a lot more, it means the "pursuit or interest to which someone ascribes supreme importance." That is because the word religion comes from the Latin word "Religare" which means "to bind." In other words all of humanity has a religion, whatever they call it, even science, or even atheism is in itself a religion, if we go by the original meaning of the word religion. That is, they are "bound" to what they think, confess and teach, and even defend.

What I'm saying is that "the world" John focuses more on is really about faith and religion, that which people are bound to. Either we are bound to Christ, or to something else, but that something else wars, battles against the true faith. So, of those who remain under the power of sin, those who reject Christ and his Church, that's the world we need to overcome.

That situation is what was overwhelming to the young congregation at Ephesus, in fact the problem started even from within by a man by the name Cerinthus. Cerinthus made false claims regarding Jesus Christ, he taught that the man Jesus was not born of

the Virgin Mary, but was the natural-born son of Mary and Joseph. He also taught that the man Jesus and the Christ had to be distinguished from one another since the Christ only descended upon Jesus at his Baptism and then left him at his crucifixion. He also taught that Jesus was buried and will only be raised with the rest of mankind when Christ comes again at the end of time to initiate a one-thousand-year kingdom on earth. Of course Cerinthus had left the church and with him many of that congregation. Now you can see how the remaining congregation must have felt, frustrated and even defeated...

What Cerinthus started back then still continues in our day. But John tells us not to be overwhelmed by those of our day who have been conquered by the world, partly or entirely renouncing the historic real Christian faith. The modern preachers who either make salvation about us, putting aside Jesus, or even deny his virgin birth, or even denying that Jesus was and is God enfleshed as the Jehovah's Witnesses do, teaching that he is but the incarnation of the created archangel Michael.

Really, what we see today around us is nothing new. It's an old ghost with a "new face," but with the same heresies attempting to overwhelm Christians, at Ephesus, at Faith, at Emmaus, even causing divisions. And you know how divisions in the congregation feel like, don't you? Are hard, frustrating and overwhelming, but we know that those causing heresies and divisions are men and women who have been conquered by the world, by the world of false religion of empty faith. The battle we face today and what need to overcome, is not so much in the realm of the material but immaterial, at faith level.

Now, we don't conquer the world by going around bullying everybody until they do what we want. We don't conquer by withdrawing from the world like monks or nuns, so we protect ourselves from sin or being challenged in our faith. We don't conquer like a soldier who sneaks away from the battle and hides. Really we are to conquer the world by rolling up our sleeves, by getting messy as we go into the world, living in the vocations God has placed us into, sweating and toiling as we—yet with victory! We have to be in the world, and yet conquer it.

We conquer by not becoming overwhelmed by the "burdens" we face and are challenged with, like our sin of having ever entertained these same ideas about the Christian faith as Cerinthus did. Or, our sin of complacency, which refuses to counter false preaching of the faith, even accepting them and pursuing them as real and wonderful and even relevant.

Our sin of compromise, which weakens our confession of the faith, or even the sin of being silenced by the fear of conflict with—or rejection by—those to whom the love of truth would have us confess the faith.

Those things don't burden us because upon repentance and confession Christ sets us free as he forgives those sins, and in that forgiveness he keeps us strong and victorious.

So when pleasures tempt us, when money tries to entice us, when poverty tortures us, when evil people try to sway us, when our bodies break down with long term illness. We remain overcomers because of what Christ does in for us, through his grace, in the forgiveness of our sins, in the freedom he grants us because of "Water and blood."

But, how do we overcome then? We overcome through our Spirit-borne faith in Jesus Christ and our love of him and his people.

As you see, one of the marks of the overcoming believer is that he or she is “born of God” and loves the Son even as he loves the Father (v 1). And not only loves the Son and the Father but also, also loves the “children of God” that’s why we call each other brothers and sisters in Christ(v 2).

The conquering nature is “born of God.” Born in the waters of baptism makes us something more than God’s creatures; we are God’s children. In Baptism we are infused with God’s divine nature – His spiritual genetic power – into us.

John tells us that no nature but the divine nature will overcome the world; and through our baptisms we are born of the nature of God. That is how we can love God and Jesus and God’s people, because we are new Creatures.

Lack of love or feeling superior to others is not from God. And that was probably what happened in that congregation in Ephesus, that the ones who had left the congregation had in some way felt superior to the ones who were left behind. As these people may have been teachers in the church, the believers left behind were probably in a sense of depression and confusion. So John confirms that they and not the ones who had left were the true beloved of God. One has standing with the Father by remaining in the Body of Christ. Without this, one cannot be a Christian at all. Therefore brothers and sisters in Christ would love each other, as Jesus loved us, humbly and caring.

These instructions are not “burdensome” (v 3), for they don’t justify us in God’s eyes. This describes that our service to each other should not be seen as a chore but a delight. Love can be difficult at times. But true love expresses itself in difficult times not just in easy times. But through Jesus we can love. For Jesus did it by his perfect keeping of the Law on our behalf (Rom 8:1–2). By his sacrifice on the cross for our sins of doubt and complacency and compromise and silence regarding our confession of him, he showed his love for us.

The ones who conquer the world are not the ambitious but those who confess that Jesus is the Christ. This is the faith that conquers the world. And our confession is of who Christ is, not merely a human being but also God the Son. This is the nature of the Messiah. It is necessary to clarify “Christ” to distinguish from false christs who are already in the world or the Antichrist as we heard last week. We must confess the Son in order to confess the Father. We cannot go around it, or find any other explanation. Jesus was not an enlightened teacher who could lead us to God through enlighten, or humanistic teacher to just show us how to love one another. But he is the real conqueror of sin, death and the evil one, and one cannot conquer the world apart from the conqueror.

This is Jesus in whom we have our being and move. In whom our faith springs us and resides that we find the “victory that has overcome the world” (vv 4–5). The weapon with which the new nature fights against the world is faith. The world: Which, Luther says, is “the devil, the flesh, and everything that is evil” (AE 30:313). That is “passing away along with its desires” while the one who “does the will of God abides forever” (1 Jn 2:17).

This overcoming faith has as its only object Jesus the Christ, who secured that victory for us by “the Spirit and the water and the blood” (vv 6–8). And through the Holy Spirit he unites us by faith to Him when we are baptized into his blood-shedding death

and blood-renewed resurrection. And continues to feed us through yet today in his body and blood, so we be nourished and have the energy to keep going, that we may overcome the world.

So it is that in Christ we ultimately have overcome everything in the world that—if we were without him—would overwhelm us, we overcome because of Christ, in whom we need to trust.

Overcoming is what God desires for us, in the book Revelation we hear of promises for those who overcome which I would invite you to read with me:

Rev 2:7 (NKJV): “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life.”

Rev 2:11: “He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

Rev 2:17: “To him who overcomes I will give . . . a new name.”

Rev 2:26: “And he who overcomes . . . I will give power over the nations.”

Rev 3:12: “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.”

Rev 3:21: “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

Conclusion:

So, how are you feeling this morning? Overwhelmed or overcoming? Remember we are not overwhelmed by the world—or by whatever may happen to us in it—because we are Christ, and in Christ, we are overcoming the world. Amen.