

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
May 17, 2020  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
**Images of the Savior: Righteous Victor**

Dear Friends in Christ,

The second part of the second article of the Apostles' Creed states that Christ...

*Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.*

*He descended into hell.*

*The third day he rose again from the dead.*

*He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.*

This sounds a lot like the verses from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter today. Which came first. Of course, Peter wrote first and the Creed was developed as a summary statement of faith based not only on 1<sup>st</sup> Peter but on what the revealed Word of God tells us about God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, one line of the Creed comes almost exclusively from the verses before us this morning from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter. More on that phrase later.

We've been looking at the images of our Savior from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter. Most of these are taken from one word or phrase in the verses. Today we see Jesus as the Righteous Victor. Righteous is a word for Jesus in these verses. However, you will not find the word Victor. Instead, the word Victor is a way to describe all that Christ has done as summarized by Peter here and by the early Christians in the Apostles' Creed. We see the Righteous One's victory over sin, victory over Satan, victory over death, and victory over all. Our Righteous Victor is the reason for the hope that we have.

### **1 Peter 3:15–22 (NIV84)**

*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. <sup>17</sup> It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. <sup>18</sup> For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison <sup>20</sup> who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, <sup>21</sup> and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*

When we see the word “righteous” in the Bible, we can simply think of someone who does everything right. Jesus is the only one who fits that description perfectly. Only Christ has done everything right. He kept every commandment. He did not commit even one sin, not even one rebellious thought against his Father. He is righteous. On the other hand, the unrighteous are those who do not do everything right. One wrong action, one sinful thought, one hate filled word makes one unrighteous. In fact, we were unrighteous from the time we first existed because of original sin. Christ is righteous. We are unrighteous.

So who will win the victory, the righteous or the unrighteous? Let's take this out of the spiritual realm and talk about something some of us are missing at this time. Baseball. Which baseball team will win the game, the

righteous or the unrighteous? Will the team that does everything right win or will the team that throws to the wrong base, drops most fly balls, can't throw a strike, and swings wildly at every pitch in the dirt? A team that commits many errors is going to have a difficult time winning against a fundamentally sound team that throws, catches, hits and pitches the right way. Back in the spiritual realm, there is no chance for an unrighteous person to win the victory and earn eternal life with God. One error, one sin, disqualifies one from this victory.

But Peter tells us the good news of our Righteous Victor. Christ won the victory over sin in our place. By his death, God has forgiven all our sins. Through faith in the Righteous One who died for us, we are credited with his righteousness so that we are no longer separated from God, but are now brought to God. Peter writes of his victory with these words: *Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.*

But our Righteous Victor does not stop with victory over sin. The promise made to Adam and Eve was for a Savior who would crush the head of the serpent. They were looking for a male offspring of a woman to destroy the power of the devil. So Christ must also be victorious over Satan. Forgiving sin is part of that victory. Satan can no longer accuse us of sin because Christ has paid for that sin and it no longer counts against us.

Here is the passage of the Bible that gives us that curious phrase in the Creed, "he descended into hell." Peter writes: *He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison.*

Sometime between Jesus' death on Good Friday and his bodily resurrection and appearance to the women on Easter Sunday, Jesus descended into hell. He has already paid the price for our sins. Jesus said, "It is finished" on Friday. Therefore, he is not going to hell to suffer for our sins. No, he descends into hell to preach to the spirits in prison. Peter gives us an example of those who are in hell, those who refused to repent at the time of Noah. What message could Jesus preach to Satan and those in hell? The time for repentance has gone, now is the time to proclaim victory. Christ is the one promised to Adam and Eve and has crushed the head of the serpent. Christ is the conquering general who marches into the enemy capital to proclaim victory over the enemy.

This is good news for us who faces Satan's lies and attacks daily. Because our Righteous Victor holds the field forever, we can sing:

*Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us,  
We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower us.  
This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will,  
He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done!  
One little word can fell him. (A Mighty Fortress, CW 200:3)*

Peter now goes beyond Christ's victory over sin and Satan to his victory over death:

*In it [the ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

The flood at Noah's time destroyed all who were not on the ark. Only those on the ark were saved from physical death, at least for a time. Noah and his family on the ark lived for centuries after the ark came to rest on dry ground. However, their physical bodies would one day die too. Jesus has won the permanent victory over death

by his own resurrection from the dead. Death could not hold him and neither can death hold us who hold to Christ by faith.

But how can we hold to Christ when corona virus is always in the news? When jobs are threatened, hours are cut and uncertainty remains for our economy? How can we hold to Christ when we are connected to our brothers and sisters in the faith through a screen? Peter tells us not to worry about all these things that threaten to disrupt or even end our lives. It is not even up to us to hold onto Christ for he first holds onto us. God grabbed us first and made us his own in Holy Baptism. As the waters of the flood lifted up Noah's family above the destruction, so also Baptism saves us from eternal death by connecting us to the resurrection of Christ. So our salvation is God's work from beginning to end. Our Righteous Victor has won eternal life for us. We need not fear death.

And now our Savior has *ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty*.

Thursday is Ascension Day, forty days after Easter. Peter tells us that this is an important day to remember the victory Christ has won. For Christ's ascension proves his victory and shows us the extent of his victory. Peter writes: *Jesus Christ....has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him*.

Jesus descended into hell to announce his victory over the enemy. His ascension is the ticker tape parade when he returns home with the victory secured. He is once again given the place of honor and power at the right hand of God. He has taken up his power and glory fully since his resurrection and now it is on full display. For he rules over all things and over all other powers, both of this earth and in the heavenly realms.

So can we have hope when our day has not gone how we planned, even when it was our sin that caused the bad day? Can we have hope when a pandemic upsets all facets of our lives? Can we have hope when loved ones die or when we face our final days? Can we have hope when Satan is prowling around like a lion seeking to devour us? The answer is, of course, "yes" to all of these questions. We can have hope. But more important than being able to give the right answer is knowing the reason. For it is the reason that gives us confidence in our answer of having hope in all situations. The reason is that Jesus has won every victory. He is the Righteous Victor.

Amen.