

Take Heart

Trinity CRC, June 16, 2019 AM
Installation of Office Bearers; Father's Day

John 16 (v.33)
Rev. Richard J. deLange

Dear friends of our Lord Jesus,

This past week sports fans celebrated two big wins: In basketball, the Toronto Raptors seized the Larry O'Brien Cup, the highest honour in the NBA. And hockey's Stanley Cup flew high in the hands of the St. Louis Blues. Each team had a hard-fought battle on the way to victory. But such a joy when the hard work is behind you! Being on the winning team is exhilarating! It's something the players work their whole lives to attain. And it's so fun to be the fans of the winners as you celebrate the victory of your team! People were hooting and hollering even on the streets of Edmonton when the Raptors won on Thursday night. Fans partied into the wee hours of the night all over the country. Oh, the thrill of victory!

Referring to the Raptors "We the North" slogan, someone said, "We the North are now We the Champions." Yes, champions! It was a long road to the championship: 24 seasons in the making for the Raptors and 50 for the Blues! You add up the years of hard work for each player on those teams over all the years and we're talking thousands of combined years of effort going into getting the ultimate prizes in sports.

When you turn in your Bible to John 16, you are hearing the words of our Lord Jesus who spent his whole human life—about 33 years—devoted to winning the prize for which his Father sent him to earth. And for the last 3 or 4 years of his life, Jesus devoted himself to 12 disciples in particular but many more alongside of the dozen. Our Bible reading is hours before the big game, you might say. It's the last chance our Lord has to speak meaningfully to the team he's been coaching before his season with them ends. None of them really understands what he's saying to them about leaving and coming back. They don't fully understand his talk of facing hard battles and difficult opponents. The last verse of John 16 summarizes it. Listen again.

Jn 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Jesus is talking like a winner here. He's speaking as if the final game has already been played. If this were the eve of the final game of the season, Jesus is the player-coach; in fact, he's the main player on the team. And before the game even starts, he's saying, "I've already won the game for you. So get out there and do your best. The victory is in the bag! It's certain. I've got it all under control so take heart. It'll be alright!"

The Reason for His Confidence

The Lord Jesus speaks with such confidence for a reason. Despite the fact that Jesus has not yet gone to the cross, has not yet died nor risen from the dead,

he speaks as through the victory is done. He does that for the benefit of the disciples. Later they will look back on his finished work and realize—as the Spirit gives them greater understanding—that Jesus never wavered from the path marked out for him by the Father. He set out to save the world by giving up his life. That was the game plan. It was his commitment to the divine agenda of salvation that helped him endure all the rejection, all the hatred, all the brutality and all the forsakenness that would occur in the coming hours. He knows what he is about to undergo and he's fully committed to it because that's the only way to save the world. He is motivated by love for the world. He knows the victory is all but accomplished.

Ten days ago was the 75th anniversary of D-day for the Allies in World War 2. On June 6, 1944, D-day, over 155,000 troops broke through the Nazi defence on the beaches of Normandy, France. That was the beginning of the end for the Nazis. It still took a year to end the war but D-day was the decisive turning point. The victory for the Allies over the Nazis was all but done.

That's what Jesus is saying to his disciples when he speaks with such confidence here in John 16. I must still go to the cross. But I will win the victory for you and ensure that you have every resource needed to finish up this spiritual battle.

All the “things” (v.33) that Jesus has told his disciples about include “informing them that he had come from the Father, had entered the world, was leaving again, and was about to go back to the Father. He had pointed out that he would be betrayed by a man who ate at his table; that he would be denied three times;... that *the world* would rejoice in his death; and that *his own disciples* would leave him alone in the hour of crisis.” The fulfilment of these prophecies” writes one author, “would naturally strengthen” the faith of the disciples once they realized that everything Jesus had said did truly occur. And once his victory is clear the disciples will return to the mission entrusted to them. They will return with boldness and faith. They will be empowered by the Holy Spirit and stay the course, proclaiming the gospel.

To put it simply, Jesus says, “When you look back on this conversation in a week or so, you'll see that I was right. I told you about all the trouble that was going to happen. But I got through it. And you got through it. So don't be discouraged when new trouble arises in the days ahead. You can expect that you'll face opposition when you live and preach the gospel. I faced it and I defeated death through my resurrection. And because I live, you have nothing to fear. I've got your victory in the bag too. Take heart. I have overcome the enemy.” Jesus says this with full confidence before it even happens!

The Promise of His Peace for Us

Jesus not only speaks with confidence to encourage his disciples. He also promises them peace.

Jn 16:33a I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.

Through faith every disciple of Jesus receives the greatest of all blessings, *the peace of Christ*. Jesus has made us right with God and nothing can undo his good work. Think of Romans 5:1 which says,

Rom 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

But here in John 16, Jesus contrasts peace with trouble. In this world, Jesus says, you can expect *trouble*. *The world*, as Jesus uses the term here, persecutes the Church. The world under Satan's influence always tries to *push away* or *dismiss* true believers, pressuring us to say "no" to following Jesus and his ways.

So, Jesus' disciples can expect trouble from the world. Think about what Jesus said to the twelve in v.2, for example:

Jn 16:2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.

We shouldn't be surprised when those who don't believe in Jesus push us away, marginalize us and even oppose us. It is happening more and more today in our own society. And we can cry about the decline of our society, I suppose. But opposition to Jesus can be expected, he says. If people oppose Jesus, we can expect that they will oppose his disciples. Satan will always try to oppose the gospel.

However, we have the promise of peace, no matter what happens to us. No matter what opposition. No matter what trouble. Peace isn't something we always have because when we take our focus off of Jesus and put it on the problem, then worry sets in and peace slips away. But Jesus is our source of peace. His victory bought us peace with God and in him we can live with peace every day.

I remember a hard time on my first summer assignment as a seminary student. I was maybe 25 or 26 years old. I had been in the church for about a month. The phone rang. Bad news! A 19 year old daughter of the congregation had been killed in a car accident. "Can I come to her parents house?" asks the caller. Up to that point, no one taught me what to do in that kind of situation. I didn't have a mentor close by to call and walk me through this. So I just went down to my office and prayed for a while for the Lord's help because I was so uncertain and walking into a home filled with troubled people.

I love how the Lord provided because it helped me to know that I could depend on him any time. I got to the door and the grandmother met me. She basically took me by the hand and told me what to do each step of the way. I don't know why she did that. But the Lord used her. When she met me at the door, she said, "Why don't you go into the kitchen and give your condolences and hugs to her parents?" So I did that. Then a few minutes later, she said to me, "Would you like to read a Bible passage with us?" I think I chose Psalm 23. We read that together, talked a little more. And then grandma said, "Pastor, can you please pray with us?" And that was indeed the right thing to do. The Holy Spirit gave me the words. And after that, grandma thanked me for coming, asked me to come back the next day and walked me to door. God provided me with direction in a very troubling situation.

That experience and many others since have helped fortify the peace of Christ in my life. I still get fearful sometimes when I'm put into new situations or faced with opposition. But I try to quickly run back to Jesus, get my heart set back on him and move forward with his peace. Peace makes all the difference. That's what Jesus gives us.

The Call to be Courageous

So, Jesus gives us confidence in his victory for us. Then he promises us his peace, no matter what the trouble we face as servants of the gospel. And finally, in our text, he calls us to be courageous.

The words translated "take heart" in the NIV mean be courageous. You see all the opposition around or feel the fear within you? Yes! But you know that Jesus has defeated the enemy. We know that better than the disciples did when Jesus said these words. We can look at Jesus' victory and see that he was right. So we can rightly have confidence in his power for us. It was that confidence and peace that drove the disciples to the ends of the earth to share the gospel. It was Christ's confidence and peace in them that moved the church forward. Christ's resurrection power in his people gave them courage to do what the Holy Spirit had in store for them!

We are not likely going to have to march into a Roman Coliseum like the early Christians who were fed to the lions. But wherever we are called to serve and live the gospel, Jesus is calling us to go courageously. And if we face opposition, he will help us. If we face our own fears, he will help us. If we feel troubled or afraid, he will be with us, giving his Spirit's power to help us.

Be assured that the Lord has ways for me and you to courageously share the gospel. Not everyone is going to be a preacher. But everyone can share the love of Christ and be part of the Spirit's work in moving the gospel forward in our world.

It needs to start in our homes. Fathers and mothers need to be pointing their children to Jesus. It's not enough to send our kids to Christian schools and Wee Worship and the like. Those are all excellent helps for the family. And important. But kids need to see that Jesus is present in the lives of Dad and Mom. They need to see parents stepping up courageously to serve the Lord.

I talked to a guy last weekend who interestingly mentioned that he had talked to my dad many years ago. And my dad said to him something like, "When the church calls me to be an elder, I see it as the Lord's calling and I can't say no without a very good reason." Those words came back to this guy 30 years later when the church asked him to serve as an elder. So he courageously stepped forward and is now serving and finding blessing in it. This morning we celebrate that men and women are stepping forward to serve as deacons and elders in this church. That takes courage, especially if you haven't done it before. It takes

courage to say, “Yes, Jesus! I will do this job because I love you and because I know that your kingdom matters more than anything else in this world. I will be a servant of the gospel.”

The movie *Overcomer* is coming out this summer. The trailer depicts a coach who ends up in a poor part of the city where kids don't get a lot of help to get ahead. He thought he could be a basketball coach, but he ends up coaching cross-country which he knows very little about. When only one girl comes out to practice, he feels like giving up. He feels inadequate for the job and doesn't want to bother for just one kid. But he senses the Lord is calling him to that mission. So he sticks with it and blesses that one girl as he lives out the gospel and gives her an opportunity she wouldn't get otherwise to develop her Christ-given talents.

When our loved ones are ill, we live out the gospel by caring for them. I remember very well the number of abandoned people in the Calgary Hospital years ago. My mom was there after breaking her neck in a car accident. There were other patients in that ward whose spouse left them because, they said, “I married an able-bodied man and I can't live with someone who is now disabled.” It takes courage from Jesus to stick with our loved one when the going gets rough. So Jesus gives us courage to do hard things of all kinds.

I was talking to Dick & Lottie Cook this past week. They shared how some of the best years of their lives involved doing prison ministry while they lived in BC. It can take courage to go into a prison where hardened criminals can be very intimidating. Similarly, Calvin College and Calvin Seminary offer courses in a Michigan prison. Professors go into the jail and share with prisoners how Jesus transforms every area of life. The Holy Spirit is using his people to go into the jail and break the spiritual chains of prisoners through the gospel.

These are a few examples of how we can courageously live out the gospel. Sometimes in the face of opposition or difficult odds. But Jesus always gives the courage to do this. Moreover, we get the blessings of serving that freely flow our way.

Congregation, our church has many places where you can serve. The larger community is always in need of servant-hearted people like you. Look around. Ask the Lord where he wants you to serve. He said we could ask and he will provide. This is not cheap talk from our Lord Jesus. This is assurance that he'll provide strength. It's already guaranteed by his victory if we'll just ask! That's what he said! And his victory for us is far, far greater than an NBA championship or a Stanley Cup. It has eternal value.

So look to Jesus, dear friends. Look to Jesus. Take heart! Hear the encouragement of our victorious player-coach. The courage we need is not in our strength but in his grace to us!