

“MORE THAN CONQUERORS”

Romans 8:31-39 Matthew 20:1-18

3/23/08 Easter Sunday Sermon by Rev. Mark E. Heiner, Pastor FBC Rutland VT

He was the lead Japanese pilot on the December 7, 1941, raid on Pearl Harbor. He was the one who shouted the war cry, “Tora, Tora, Tora!”

In his own words, Mitusuo Fuchida said,

“I must admit I was more excited than usual as I awoke that morning at 3:00 a.m., Hawaii time, four days past my 39th birthday. Our six aircraft carriers were positioned 230 miles north of Oahu Island. As general commander of the air squadron, I made last-minute checks on the intelligence information reports in the operations room before going to warm up my single-engine, three-seater “97-type” plane used for level bombing and torpedo flying.

The sunrise in the east was magnificent above the white clouds as I led 360 planes towards Hawaii at an altitude of 3,000 meters. I knew my objective: to surprise and cripple the American naval force in the Pacific.

As we neared the Hawaiian Islands that bright Sunday morning, I made a preliminary check of the harbor, nearby Hickam Field and the other installations surrounding Honolulu. Viewing the entire American Pacific Fleet peacefully at anchor in the inlet below, I smiled as I reached for the mike and ordered, “All squadrons, plunge in to attack!” The time was 7:49 a.m.

During the next 3 hours, I directly commanded the fifty level bombers as they pelted not only Pearl Harbor, but the airfields, barracks and dry docks nearby. Then I circled at a higher altitude to accurately assess the damage and report it to my superiors.

It was the most thrilling exploit of my career. Ever since I had heard of my country’s winning the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, I had dreamed of becoming an admiral like Admiral Togo, our commander-in-chief in the decisive Battle of the Japan Sea.

With the end of the war, my military career was over, since all Japanese forces were disbanded. I returned to my home village near Osaka and began farming, but it was a discouraging life. I became more and more unhappy, especially when the war crime trials opened in Tokyo. Though I was never accused, Gen. Douglas MacArthur summoned me to testify on several occasions.

The spiritual life of every man and woman ever born on this earth is a battle. It's true whether the person is godly or ungodly. The Bible teaches that there are two eternally antagonistic powers in every soul: the spiritual and the physical.

One or the other is constantly battling for supremacy. In the ungodly person's life, the physical is stronger than the spiritual and that produces enslavement.

In the godly person, the spiritual is stronger than the physical and that produces freedom.

The history of the world is a moral history of this conflict. The decisive battle of this campaign between the spiritual and physical was fought at Calvary when the sinless son of God, Jesus Christ, died a physical death on behalf of all of us. Right then and there, the foundations for spiritual victory were laid.

On Easter morning, God raised Christ from the grave, from physical death. The huge stone covering the entrance to the walk in tomb had been moved by God and at first, it sent Jesus' disciples into a frenzy thinking some sort of foul-play.

For one woman named Mary Magdalene this presented a crisis. During her life before meeting the Lord, she had been possessed with demons, plural-7 to be exact. Numbers in the Bible have meanings and the #7 means "full" or "complete." Mary's life was one of complete spiritual torment. Then she met Jesus and Jesus mercifully drove the demons from her life and she was made well ever after.

Now alone in the garden on Sunday morning, she had come to find solace near the body of her friend and Savior. In spite of Jesus' advance assurances that he would rise again, none of the disciples were expecting the resurrection.

Had you or I been in Mary's shoes, a missing body could have had serious implications beyond suspicion of grave robbers.

Perhaps her first thought was, had the liberty Jesus brought to her soul been all just fanciful thinking?

Did she just imagine what a wonderful change He had brought? Was this separation from Christ permanent and therefore, an ominous sign that she would now relapse into her former tormented life?

In the misty light of dawn, her eyes filled with tears and her mind still in shock, she turned and saw a figure she mistook for the gardener.

The voice was compassionate and asked why she was crying and who she was looking for.

Then that Stranger spoke her name, "Mary," and it all "finally clicked."

Here was the vindication of Mary's weak faith, but great love. She received Jesus back from the dead. The difference is that Jesus' resurrection marked him now as not as earthly friend as before his death...

but Jesus was now her risen Lord and Christ. It's the same relationship, but on a much higher plain. Jesus goes from being her earthly friend, to ascending to the Father where he will personally represent Mary before God.

Translation! Mary's quality of life is not diminishing-
---it's about to blossom.

Mary is assured-there is no permanent separation from Christ!

Now I'm going to ask you to use your imagination a bit this Easter morning. There's this large cathedral that's still under construction.

The workers on the cathedral have rigged a "cage elevator" inside so they can get construction materials up and down to the upper floors.

If you've never seen one, a characteristic of these "cage elevators" is that the doors (gate) must be closed manually for them to be "called" to another floor.

One day one of the workers, Peter by name, took the elevator to the top floor, and it was subsequently needed on the first floor by the cathedral's sexton.

Unfortunately, Peter forgot and left the door open.

After the sexton rang for the elevator a couple times, to no avail, he figured out why the lift wasn't coming down.

At that point, visitors touring the cathedral were treated to this rare sight: The sexton of the cathedral, head tipped up, yelling up to the heavens:

“Peter! CLOSE THE GATES!!!”

Now, I have no way of knowing where you're at this morning in your spiritual life. Maybe you're here today but feel that you can't seem to get up-any closer to God.

Or, perhaps you feel like you're just yelling and no one's listening.

Maybe you even imagine the elevator is out of order and you'll just have to find your own way up.

Wherever you may be, I'm here to tell you this morning that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, the elevator of love is in perfect working condition, and he has not forgotten about sending the elevator back down for you and me.

God never intended to consign any of us to a life of frustration figuring out how we're going to get up there where Jesus is. Jesus is the Captain of our salvation and while he never guaranteed any of us heaven without the hazard of conflict, or doing battle--- the truth is...

His resurrection has achieved a victory on such a scale---it was such a rousing victory--- that those who follow him are not just called “conquerors”-

-----they are called

“MORE THAN CONQUERORS.”

In other words, in the life of every true believer this morning, there must be something that corresponds to the elastic, gargantuan, and all encompassing victory of the resurrected Christ.

That something can be identified in one word..... “Assurance!”

There are 3 main areas of life where the resurrection of Christ imparts assurance that you and I are meant to be more than conquerors in the battle of life.

First, there’s assurance in the matter of our present standing before God. If you’re like me, you may have little or no doubt about God’s power which raised Jesus from the dead. After all Jesus led a perfectly holy and God pleasing life.

But.....we may have serious reservations about our own worthiness when once we see our moral failure against the background of God’s purity and holiness.

The I.R.S. received a letter which read,

Dear Sir:

My conscience bothered me. Here is the \$175. I owe in back taxes.

There was a P.S. at the bottom which read,

“If my conscience still bothers me, I’ll send in the rest.”

There’s an old English proverb that says,

“A guilty conscience needs no accuser.” You see, the Bible says, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Rom.3:23 At the bar of conscience we know that we have failed to meet the standards of integrity of a holy God.

In reply to all this the Bible says, “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is there to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who died, more than that-who was raised to life and is at God’s right hand interceding for us.

Translation! The prosecutor’s case has collapsed. Though they are sinners, anyone who puts there faith in the risen Christ have Jesus for their lawyer-and he has never lost a case yet...so believe it, that makes you More Than A Conqueror.

The second area of assurance created by the resurrection of Christ is in the matter of

facing life's adversity.

Some of the early Christians living in Rome were poor.

They knew deprivation, hardship and peril.

They suffered harassment and physical abuse at the hands of persecutors.

They were ridiculed for their faith in fellow who died a scandalous death on a cross. In a sense, they faced death in the face daily.

Maybe you're here this morning quietly listening to this sermon and thinking nobody knows what I'm going back home to today.

Bills stacking up, can't find employment, kids crying, disappointed by relationships, incredibly lonely and just plain tired after a long winter.

Maybe you feel like W.C. Fields who once said,

"Smile first thing in the morning and get it over with."

It's not hard to dismiss hardships if we've never had to endure them.

But remember, the Bible never promises immunity from tough times.

The Apostle Paul was beaten, hunted down like an animal, almost drowned in shipwrecks and stuck in a dirty prison all alone and eventually was martyred for his faith in Christ.

The good news of the gospel of Jesus's death and resurrection doesn't mean we get a free pass from misfortune-it means that knowing Christ is alive enables us to find in them a blessing, not a curse.

The Bible puts it this way,

"Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." 2 Cor. 4:17

This morning your troubles may be heavy and I'm not here to minimize them, but your faith and obedience in suffering pleases God, and He will not forget it. That's the assurance that makes us more than conquerors this morning.

The third area of assurance created by Christ's resurrection is found in having a secure future.

The wisest and richest man who ever lived once said,
 "Don't boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth."

Prov. 27:1

James, the brother of our Lord wrote,
 "Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.

What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

James 4:13-15

A few days before his death, Dr. F. B. Meyer wrote a very dear friend these words: "I have just heard, to my great surprise, that I have but a few days to live. It may be that before this reaches you, I shall have entered the palace. Don't trouble to write. We shall meet in the morning."

Does that resonate with you. Do you have that assurance this Easter morning. Jesus Christ died and rose to communicate that message that God is Supreme and that there is nothing in all of creation that could intervene to cut us off from God. That's what makes us more than conquerors.

Back quickly to Japan, Pearl Harbor and Mitsuo Fuchida. After the war, Fuchida was a defeated warrior in occupied Japan, farming to meet the needs of his family. In 1950, Fuchida miraculously came to know Jesus Christ as Saviour through a tract handed to him while exiting a train in Tokyo. The tract was entitled, "I Was a Prisoner of Japan," written by Jacob DeShazer who was one of the famous Doolittle Raiders.

DeShazer trusted Christ as his Savior while held captive by Japan for 40 months. Following his release, he returned to Japan in 1948 as a missionary and preached to the

nation who held him captive. Fuchida faithfully served Jesus Christ as an evangelist until his death in 1976. “From Pearl Harbor to Calvary” is Fuchida’s testimony of salvation. Conquerors in history have come and gone, but Jesus Christ conquered sin and death and nothing can separate us from that love.