

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, September 20, 2022
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“No ‘IF’ IN VICTORY”

READING: I Cor.15:51-57 – Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Driving along I-65 or I-265 one cannot help but see the huge billboards that advertise legal firms who specialize in personal lawsuits for injuries and losses associated with vehicle accidents. Two firms in particular must have advertising budgets in the tens of millions. They have numerous billboards for mile after mile. Guess there’s a lot of money in those personal injury cases.

What caught my eye today was this: “PAY ONLY IF WE WIN”. Then there was a second one that had a website address of: “WE WIN.COM”. Both of those hold out the promise of being victorious in a court of law based on the hard work and competence of the lawyers who would represent you. They will receive nothing unless they bring you to victory, and a large judgment is handed to you to compensate you.

The truth is that neither firm will take much of a chance on your case unless they are quite confident that your opponents and their lawyers will cave in and seek a settlement. They don’t WANT to go to court with you because that costs them a lot of money. Neither do they want to go to court with a shaky case that might be tossed out or overturned in court. That costs them lots of money. Notice also the word “IF” in that first slogan! “IF” we win. There is no promise. There is no guarantee. Victory is a hope, an ambition, a possibility, but they cannot and will not guarantee your victory should the case go to a jury. They can’t. They won’t. They shouldn’t. Even “WE WIN” is just wishful thinking and more of a come-on than any kind of promise of victory.

All of this leads me to the reading for today and the different kind of language we see in St. Paul’s message to the Corinthians and to us. The whole chapter of I Cor.15 is Paul’s treatise on the Resurrection of Jesus and its central importance to Christians and the Christian faith. Earlier in the chapter he says, “If Christ be not raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.” He gets right to the foundation of the Christian message and all that it stands for. No empty tomb on Easter, no life after death, no heaven, no hope. Then in v.20 he concludes, “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

Because of Easter’s miracle and the power displayed in Jesus’ resurrection, St. Paul can speak without hesitation about “the victory” God has ALREADY given us through Jesus Christ our Lord. There are no “IF’s”, there are no “BUT’s”, there are no contingencies or vagaries. St. Paul doesn’t advertise the resurrection as a possibility or a vague hope. No! He speaks of our victory in Christ as absolute, irrevocable, and without doubt. We don’t pay “if we win”. Jesus has already paid all we owe on the cross. Now there is for us a future and full life beyond the grave.

When Paul uses the term “firstfruits” he is speaking to the Jewish Christians who know how the term was used in the sacrificial system. Farmers would go into the first fields to ripen for the harvest, usually barley. They would search out the very finest stalks of grain, tie them into a small sheaf, and take them to the

priests who would offer them as a burnt offering before the Lord. These were called “the firstfruits”, and they were understood to be a promise of the REST OF THE HARVEST YET TO COME.

When St. Paul says that Jesus is the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”, he is indicating that Jesus is the first one to rise from the grave, but he will certainly not be the last one. His resurrection is the promise of ALL THE REST TO FOLLOW: you and me inclusive! Because of that assurance St. Paul speaks with conviction about our “victory” – no “if’s”, no “and’s”, and no “but’s”. It’s a done deal. The victory is already ours because Christ Jesus is already the VICTOR! Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENT(S):

- 1) IF you are signed up to take a float on the “Mary K. Miller” on Thursday, remember we leave church at 11:00. The tour goes 12-2:00 P.M. Then we will travel to Jeffersonville’s downtown for lunch at “TOWN – A Neighborhood Pub” They offer all kinds of Italian favorites as well as other dishes. (You might even get a chance to dash into Schimpf’s Candy before we head back to church.)
- 2) GOLDEN SAINTS LUNCHEON: Next Thursday, September 29, about noon, join us for lunch in the Fireside Room. Whether you attend the Thursday Saints Bible Class or not, bring a dish to share. The meat, beverages, and table service will be provided. Join us for wonderful food, good fellowship, and some fun.