

SERMON

Romans 8:31-39

Glorious Conquerors

Nunawading and Waverley, 26-7-20

Dear friends in Christ,

The other day, someone outside of our congregation, asked me how people were responding spiritually to the pandemic. He mentioned his brother, a Christian like him, has undergone a reawakening. His brother admitted that he hadn't been taking Christ seriously and needed to reform himself. Being a keen woodworker, he went into his workshop and made a cross to hang inside his house to remind him of what life was really about.

It is great that some are discerning a spiritual message in these times. Though when you hear of numbers not quarantining themselves when experiencing symptoms, clearly, they have not humbled themselves sufficiently. I believe our Father is using this pandemic to remind us of our finitude. We may live with a disability or some people struggle with poverty. Enduring hardship like this should lead us to Christ and to all the treasures of his cross, resurrection and ascension. An epidemic should make humanity realise it is not divine. We are not little gods of the universe.

Our television doesn't pick up one particular channel very well. It pixilates and distorts every now and again but the sound and images come through most of the time. The pandemic has pixilated our world but the colour and sound of God's kindness in Christ ARE still coming through. This old world gets a bit shaky at times. It's a good world but not a perfect one. The gospel tells us that Christ has remodelled this universe through his cross and through his resurrection power, shares this victory with you and me. By faith, we become conquerors like him.

There is another source of hardship and that is persecution. Early Christians were often taken to court because Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire. They faced false accusations and judgements that dispossessed them of property or even of life. And so, the apostle Paul asks rhetorically: **What will we say in response to these things?**

What are we going to say? What is our confession of faith? Against the background of lockdowns, our frustrations and the real suffering of job and business losses, are we hearing the clear sound of our Father's victory? **If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also freely give us all things with him?** Since

God is for us, he is not only with us but actively defending us. We may wonder why he doesn't squash the pandemic with his power? That would be asking for a different universe with a different set of laws as well as a world without human freedom. Didn't Covid19 arise from a wet market, after all? Sounds like human beings were partly if not fully responsible. Rather, what he gives us is his Son, who is victorious over all the world. We can now ask our Lord Jesus to help us and to speak to the Father for us. As Paul said, he **is at the right hand of God interceding for us.**

In the movie Hotel Mumbai, based on the jihadist attack against the landmark hotel in 2008 when 31 people were killed, one rich guest taken hostage, spits at his captors, abuses them, bites and fights, all brave acts of course, though futile because he is eventually shot. In contrast, staff sacrificially herd guests into safe parts of the hotel, always polite, not forgetting an elderly person and eventually finding a way out to safety for those under their charge. In the pandemic, we can see the grace of God at work in the quiet acceptance of restrictions, the around the clock testing, health care workers risking their health for others and businesses and schools adapting to online work and work from home. These things are evidence of the quiet, behind-the-scenes work of our heavenly Father answering our prayers.

We Christians know of the ultimate victory over the difficulties, persecutions and suffering of life. Now, we look forward **to receiving all things as well as Jesus Christ himself.** There is absolutely nothing in this life or beyond this life that **can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.** We are **super conquerors**, which is the literal translation, because of the grip our Saviour has on us. He has bonded us to himself in baptism with the result that he does not love us from a distance but holds us to himself, within him so that his love is within our entire selves, body and mind. We know that we shall conquer because in faith we have already risen with him. Thus, let us face the hardship with confidence and a definite sense of victory.