

“At the Right Hand of God”

**First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
June 16, 2019**

Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 8:1-4

New Testament Lesson: Acts 2:33-36

While Yuri and I were in California earlier this month visiting family and friends, we came upon a grouping of three giant redwood trees in someone’s front yard of all places! Usually, redwoods are found clustered together in dense forests. This is because the huge redwoods have interlocking root systems that keep them from being blown over by high winds.

We’re talking about trees that are 300 feet tall and over 2,000 years old. And instead of being held up by roots that go 20 or 30 feet into the earth, they have each other, their roots intertwined across vast parcels of land.

Today is Trinity Sunday, the day we celebrate and explore the nature of the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We can think of the Triune God as a grouping of three giant redwoods – three majestics reaching high into the sky, each supporting the other through an interlocking root system, a connection that goes largely unseen. But the connection is there nonetheless, reaching across the globe kind of like the trees from Adult Bible School spreads out across the Communion Table. While these paper and pipe cleaner trees may topple at any moment, nothing can shake the unity of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We see that in today’s New Testament lesson, where the Triune God stands firm against all in opposition – “Sit at my right hand,” says God, “until I make your enemies your footstool.” God the Father, Jesus the Son, with the promise of the Holy Spirit.

Last Sunday, we looked at Christ’s victory over the forces of death and decay, and came to know that nothing above or below has any power to bring Jesus down. This Sunday, we look more specifically at the greatest enemy of God, those sinful, misguided, hellish forces that take hold of us and corrupt the world we live in.

Today’s scripture lesson is a continuation of Peter’s proclamation of the Risen Lord. Specifically, Peter proclaims Jesus as “exalted at the right hand of God, ... having received ... the Holy Spirit,” in his earthly ministry so that he could rise victorious over the powers of evil.

Peter again uses the words of King David, this time from Psalm 110, where it says, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” This statement is prophecy fulfilled. So Peter declares it, saying “... Let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made (Jesus) both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Whenever or wherever the power of evil is so bold as to seek to kill and destroy the spirit of Jesus Christ, God stands victorious. We see this throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry, God standing victorious. Jesus faced many enemies – the Pharisees chief among them. And yet, how did he overcome these forces mounted against him? Not through battle, right? Not through fighting.

So how did Jesus overcome opposition? If you think through what you’ve read and heard from the Bible, you get a very different picture. The way Jesus overcomes opposition is by speaking truth to abuse of power, saying, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” By praying for his enemies, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.”

By embracing wayward souls in Christian fellowship - and not distancing himself from them – but rather saying to the tax collector Zacchaeus, “I must stay at your house today.” Even when it was clear he had the upper hand, when those with power over him were in need, he didn’t attack; he showed mercy, healing the Roman Captain’s servant. And for those who tried to trick him were met with wisdom and guidance, and not disdain and contempt, like when Jesus provided private instruction to the Pharisee Nicodemus.

Jesus overcame the forces mounted against him through everything but fighting back! Instead of standing against them, Jesus stood with God. That is how he overcame evil, with confidence that God would win the day, God would raise him up.

And so it is for us. Knowing that God did raise him up, we are confident that God is there for us, as well. God is with us through the Spirit of God that Jesus has sent to us, a Spirit that draws near when we are most vulnerable, in greatest need. It’s like the guy who had to get a new psychiatrist. At his first visit, the man settled himself on the couch and the psychiatrist began by saying, “Since this is our first session, perhaps you should start at the very beginning.” “Of course,” replied the patient.... “In the beginning, I created the Heavens and the Earth...” God showing up in the most peculiar ways, particularly when we are most vulnerable and in need.

What are some things that we battle, either individually or as a people? Addiction, anger and vengeance, the spirit of war and conquest, a sense of helplessness and depression, forces of evil actively turned against us. I think we can all relate to one or more of those battles in life.

And yet, sadly – and inevitably – the more we fight, the worse things get. Jesus shows us that the true victory is won not through fighting, but through truth and righteousness, through prayer for ourselves and for our enemies, through Christian fellowship, acts of mercy and healing, an openness to divine wisdom and guidance.

If we turn to such godly ways in the face of all that is evil and misguided, nothing can stand against us. Check it out in your own life. Wherever that battle rages on in your life or in our world, look to see if it's not because evil begets evil, brute force brings greater resistance. The truth is we cannot beat back the forces of evil through a force of will or a show of power, unless of course it is God's will and God's power.

How do we align ourselves with God's will and avail ourselves of God's power? Well, God's will is made known to us through Jesus Christ, and God's power is made active in us through the Holy Spirit. This is the Triune God standing united with us against any and all forces.

I'd like to read you something that illustrates how this cosmic battle between good and evil plays out in our lives. It's from the devotional titled "Jesus Calling." ... (read June 11). ... I like that passage because it points to the greatest impediment to our overcoming whatever we might be battling – that being, ourselves. When faced with truly insurmountable struggles, we worry that we are too weak. In this worry and fear, some of us fight all the harder, while others just give up. Either way, your struggle goes on. But what this devotional says is, "Do not despise this weakness in yourself.... You are not alone.... (Jesus is) using (your weakness) to draw you closer...."

It's not a question of how strong you are, but how close you are to the Lord, in the midst of your weakness, in the face of your fear, as you struggle in battle all alone, or so it feels. And yet, we are not alone! We made to go it alone! We were made to stand with God. "The Lord said to my Lord," says David, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." In other words, draw near to and God will overcome your enemies and ease your struggles.

So the next time you feel like shrinking away, try standing up for the truth. Or when panic sets in, turn to prayer. When your impulse is to fight back, consider an act of Christian friendship. Don't be mean, be merciful. Share and rely upon what you know and believe

about the true nature and power of God. It all comes down to God's presence in our lives and in our world. In a world so divided by hate and poverty and violence and disregard for others, we need to ask ourselves: Can God's word still pierce the heart? Can Jesus' love still mend and heal? Can the Spirit's power still reach into those dark places of our broken lives? Yes, when we stand with God. And amen to that!

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, from you we learn what a father is meant to be: strong, loving and wise. For your sake we honor those men who helped give us life, and all the men whose love and strength have helped us grow.

Thank you for the men who cuddled and played with us, and so helped us learn what your joyous love is like.

Thank you for the trustworthy men who taught us about your faithfulness. Thank you for the men who challenged us to make something of ourselves, men who wouldn't let us stop with crawling when they knew we could run.

Thank you for the men who showed us that gentleness is the proof of real strength.

Loving God, we pray for those men who are fathers, and especially those fathers who must live apart from their children. We pray your spirit of healing and wellness upon all those undergoing treatment and battling disease. We pray your spirit of hope and your abiding peace upon those who grieve.

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**