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More Than Conquerors

Core Faith

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

For the Ninth Sunday of Pentecost, this reflection on Romans 8 invites the church to wrestle honestly with suffering, hope, and God's grace. It reframes being "more than conquerors" not as power or triumph, but as redemption through Christ and deep belonging in community, where the Spirit intercedes, sustains, and draws us closer to God and one another.

REFERENCES

Genesis 29:15-28

Psalm 105:1-11, 45b

Romans 8:26-39

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

COLORS

Green

Preaching Notes

Focus Text: Romans 8:26-39

"What then are we to say about these things?" (Romans 8:31 NRSV). That is a question preachers should be asking as we approach this text. There is a lot to say, and Paul has said plenty. Some we might wrestle with from our theological perspective. What do we say about verses 29 and 30? How do we understand predestination in the Wesleyan tradition? How might we proclaim the good news of verse 28 without dismissing real suffering in our world today? Of course, we have responses and ways of understanding these words, but we might also figure out how we can leave

space for the Spirit to intercede with sighs too deep for words. Where can we give hearers breathing space to listen for those sighs? To be affirmed by that presence?

Out of all the themes that can emerge from these layered verses and deep theological wrestling, two rise to the top in the current climate in which we live. The first is toward the end, where Paul declares us “more than conquerors.” The second theme is a bit more subtle, but it permeates the whole passage with repeated emphasis and is the nature of community.

What are we claiming, and what is Paul claiming, when he declares that as Christians, we are more than conquerors? In the ongoing struggle with Christian nationalism pulling all the oxygen out of the room, with the warrior ethos echoing through the halls of political power, it is incumbent upon the church to watch its language—not to dismiss the concept, but to explore a little deeper and move beyond a militaristic understanding of conquering. Some commentators argue that Paul is here attempting to contradict, or at least challenge, the Stoic view that we “conquer” suffering by enduring it without complaint or response. His position is that we are more than this kind of conqueror, more than one who endures; rather, we are redeemed in our suffering. And we are conquerors not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done in us. To claim that we are more than conquerors does not feed into the rhetoric of nationalism; in fact, it does the opposite. Paul claims that the victory is not ours but a gift from our savior. This is not about power, in other words, but about suffering that can bring us closer to God and to one another.

This leads to another dimension that needs amplification in our current culture. From the first verse of this text, Paul suggests that all of this is a corporate experience. “Likewise,” he writes, “the Spirit helps us in our weakness” (Romans 8:26a). Do you hear that? Us, we, the saints, those who ... Paul’s argument from the start is that we must understand the nature of community to participate fully in this grace. To hear the sighs from the Spirit, to see the good being worked even in desperate circumstances, to be more than conquerors, we have to have a grasp of corporality. Discipleship has never been an individualistic exercise.

This is not to say that the individual isn’t important. Individual choices and decisions need to be made. There is such a thing as a personal relationship with Jesus that can shape an individual follower’s life and discipleship. But we have focused on the individual’s walk with Christ to the exclusion of participation in the community of faith. We have neglected to emphasize that the call to faith is a call to relationship with God and with the body of Christ.

Declaring this, we are not talking about a benefit of faith or an extra. No, we are saying something about the essence of discipleship. Faith, at its core, is a corporate experience. It is not that we

benefit from being a part of a community; we require it. Pastors are often fielding the question, “Do I need to be a part of the church to be a follower of Jesus?” Being familiar with the history of the desert fathers and mothers, we might perhaps answer, “No, not necessary, but very important.” Even those so-called hermits engaged with pilgrims and disciples who came and learned from them. So, perhaps the answer, and the one it appears that Paul advocates, is that “Yes, to be a Christian, you need a community around you.” You need a sense of belonging, a way to live out your discipleship day by day. You (you plural) need a God to worship and a neighbor to show kindness to. And you need the support of a caring community that will lift you up when you begin to flag.

That’s what it means to declare that we are more than conquerors. Not that we are the strongest, the most warrior-like, but that we are the most supported, the most connected, the most loved, even in our suffering, even in our weakness. Together, we are part of something so much bigger than ourselves. Therefore, we are more than conquerors. Thanks be to God.

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