

Easter Sunday – Year C
April 4, 2010
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Isaiah 53:12
Pastor Paul Horn

“To the Victor Go the Spoils!”

¹²Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

You probably do not remember the name Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin. During his day he was as powerful a man as there was on earth. A Russian Communist leader he took part in the Bolshevik Revolution 1917, was editor of the Soviet newspaper Pravda (which by the way means truth), and was a full member of the Politburo. His works on economics and political science are still read today. There is a story told about a journey he took from Moscow to Kiev in 1930 to address a huge assembly on the subject of atheism. Addressing the crowd he aimed his heavy artillery at Christianity hurling insult, argument, and proof against it.

An hour later he was finished. He looked out at what seemed to be the smoldering ashes of men's faith. "Are there any questions?" Bukharin demanded. Deafening silence filled the auditorium but then one man approached the platform and mounted the lectern standing near the communist leader. He surveyed the crowd first to the left then to the right. Finally he shouted the ancient greeting known well in the Russian Orthodox Church: "CHRIST IS RISEN!" En masse the crowd arose as one man and the response came crashing like the sound of thunder: "HE IS RISEN INDEED!"

I say to you this morning: CHRIST IS RISEN! (congregational response should be: HE IS RISEN INDEED!).

Many live as enemies of the message of the cross of Christ, such as Bukharin. There is an enemy that haunts us all, not just Christians. This enemy tracks us down and makes sure that none escape his icy grip. That enemy is death. Apostle Paul calls death “the last enemy.”

One day, when the world was good, very good, as God put it, this enemy invaded. The enemy took away everything. He took off with joy, peace, health and happiness. He took away life itself. This enemy, death, made off with us. We ourselves, all mankind, were taken hostage. Death carried us off in chains. We and all things God in the beginning made good and beautiful were the spoils of his dark conquest. He left nothing behind but fear.

We have no one to blame but ourselves. Our first parents brought it on themselves. So have we. The apostle Paul wrote, “**Sin entered the world through one man and death [entered the world] through sin.**” (Rom 5:12) We traded the love of God for the devil’s lies and empty promises. Our greed and worry are proofs of the reign of death over our lives. We pathetically try to grab what we can because we know that the clock is ticking. Our best ambitions and burning desires for success and achievement, for wealth and fame - all of these are part of our

quest to hold off death as long as we can. We will be disappointed over goals we never attained. We will grow weary of heart because we find ourselves in the same old rut – hankering after a better life in some other pond. But all of these things are merely the marks of our captivity in the enemy’s camp.

But then one greater than death comes along. He allows death to reign over him, but just for a little while. Then he breaks death’s reign. He shatters the chains of *rigor mortis* wrapped tight around his body. His body reanimates. His heart begins to pump. Blood flows through his veins again. His lungs breathe in the cool, morning air in the cave. His eyes open. He smiles, because he knows... he has won. “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1Cor 15 55) Oh, that’s right. You don’t have any, because you lost. Christ has won!

Walther’s Easter hymn tries to capture it: “The foe was triumphant when on Calvary, the Lord of creation was nailed to the tree. In Satan’s domain did the hosts shout and jeer, for Jesus was slain, whom the evil ones fear. But short was their triumph, the Savior arose, and death, hell and Satan, He vanquished His foes. The conquering Lord lifts His banner on high. He lives, yes, He lives, and will nevermore die!” (*Christian Worship* 143:2,3 – *He’s Risen, He’s Risen*)

The prophet Isaiah lived 700 years before Jesus was even born. Yet, writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote about the Messiah’s triumph over his enemies in great detail, as if he were standing beneath the cross watching his Savior die, as if he were standing before the empty tomb. The past last six weeks in our Wednesday evening Lenten services we have listened to Isaiah tell us about the Suffering Servant of the LORD and how he stoops to conquer. Jesus stooped low to conquer his enemies. But he has conquered! Today, through his words in chapter 53, he tells us that **To the Victor Belong the Spoils**. Listen to his words, “¹² **Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.**”

In ancient times, conquering heroes returned from the battle to a triumphant procession, to a ticker-tape parade, if you will. The victorious Roman commander rode in a flower-bedecked chariot, his defeated enemies in chains behind him, his children on white ponies beside him, the people for whom he fought cheering, carpeting his path with flowers, filling the air with the fragrance of victory. This is how Paul talks about Christ, the mighty Victor in Colossians, “**Having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.**” (2:15)

By the cross... that’s how he won the victory. Isaiah describes the battle scene, “**He poured out his life unto death.**” Is not our blood our very life? Yes, Jesus, the Lamb of God, had his blood, his life, poured out onto the ground of that hill called Golgotha. He allowed his life to literally drain away, because if all of us, the whole world, all human beings who have ever lived, were to pool their lifeblood together, it would not pay for the immense price needed to free us from our sins, from our destiny in hell, from Satan’s power. But the blood of an innocent man, a man who was also God, the blood of a sinless, holy God-man, was enough to pay for us and release us from our captivity. That’s how he won.

Isaiah continues to paint the picture, “**He was numbered with the transgressors.**” Jesus allowed himself to be counted as a criminal, crucified with two men deserving of death. Even though we are the criminals, we are the guilty ones, but the Apostle Paul says, “**God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.**” (2Cor 5:21) He died as if deserving the death of a criminal.

Isaiah adds more to the scene, “**For he bore the sin of many.**” In the Old Testament, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest laid his hands on the head of a live goat, and confessed the sins of the nation of Israel. When he had finished, he led that goat deep into the wilderness to die. The LORD was telling his people something about how he felt about their sins. Jesus was led outside of the city walls of Jerusalem. There, the Father laid his hands on his Son’s head, and placed all of our sins on him. That is why we sing, “I lay my sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God.” (CW 372:1) Jesus wins the victory by bearing my sin and yours.

Finally, Isaiah says, “**Yes! He made intercession for the transgressors.**” If you watched *The Ten Commandments* on television last night, you probably didn’t see this story portrayed... do you remember when the Israelites sinned against the LORD in the wilderness, and He wanted to destroy them and make Moses’ family into a great nation? But Moses stepped into the fray and said, “Lord, you made a promise to make this nation great and give them the Promised Land as their inheritance. Don’t do this. If you have to, erase my name from your book of life, but not theirs.” How much greater is Christ our mediator! We are the ones who have trespassed, who have crossed the line of God’s law which says, “Do this, don’t do that.” “Don’t worry. Don’t be afraid. Be content.” We’ve crossed the line. Jesus stepped in and pleaded with his Father, saying, “Look, I have given up my life for their transgressions. Regard me as guilty. Declare them innocent, for my sake.”

This is how Jesus won the battle, by the cross. He drags his enemies behind him, death, hell and Satan, bound and chained as he parades through the streets. But there’s also reward for him. Isaiah says, “**Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong.**” I think that the literal translation of the original Hebrew will help us understand better, “**Therefore, I will give him the many as his inheritance, and he shall have the rich as his spoils of war.**” Who are the many and who are the rich that are given to the Christ as his inheritance, as the reward of his victory?

If you go back to vs11, the previous verse in chapter 53, Isaiah gives us the answer, “**My righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities.**” You are the many he has as his inheritance. You are the rich, rich because you have an eternal inheritance in heaven, that he has taken as the spoils from war. Of all the things that now belong to Christ, the Victor, the dearest to Him are you and me. We no longer belong to the enemy. The enemy stole our hearts, our lives, our happiness, our future. He stole us. Christ has brought us back – the spoils of Easter morning – His conquering foot on the neck of the last enemy. We no longer belong to the enemy. We don’t even belong to ourselves. We belong to Him.

Christ Jesus won the battle, he defeated his enemies and yours and mine, and he took you as his inheritance, what does it mean for you?

St. Paul said it this way: **“What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”**
(Rom 6:1ff)

You have a new life now. You will no longer live in fear of the last enemy. You will find joy, even as you stand at the gates of a cemetery. You have a new life. You will be happy to leave behind you the life you used to live, and be eager to run in the ways of God’s commandments. You have a new life, because Christ divides with you and me the spoils of His victory: release from guilt, freedom from sin’s power, peace with God, a new life waiting for you in heaven... because to the Victor go the spoils... because for us... Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!
Amen!

We pray, “Be thou my consolation my shield when I must die, remind me of thy passion when my last hour draws nigh. Mine eyes shall then behold thee, upon thy cross shall dwell, my heart by faith enfold thee. Who dieth thus dies well.” (Paul Gerhardt 1607-1676; Lutheran pastor and hymn writer)