

SERMON FOR THE 6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER 5-5-18 Our Redeemer, Iowa City

I John 5:1-8 "We Have Conquered the World!"

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

About 7 years ago, a then 40 year old nurse from Austria, Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner, became the first woman to reach the world's 14 highest peaks without the use of supplemental oxygen. She clinched the record when she conquered the notoriously treacherous mountain known as K2. This Himalayan giant, the second highest mountain in the world, claims one out of every four climbers that sets foot on her. It was a mountain that Kaltenbrunner tried to climb six times before. How did she eventually conquer it? With much perseverance. For example, there was a stretch that took her six hours to climb 590 feet. Can you imagine that? Six hours to crawl just under the length of two football fields!

Even if you are not into mountain climbing, you have to be somewhat envious of Kaltenbrunner. Wouldn't it be great to have accomplished what she did? She has stood on the 14 highest points in the world and did it by her own effort, not by flying to these peaks in a helicopter. The Word of God before us from I John 5 teaches us that even the youngest and the frailest among us has accomplished something even greater. We have conquered the world! How? And now what? Let's answer those questions.

Over the past several weeks we have been celebrating Jesus' victory over death when He rose on Easter morning. It's a great season of the year for us as people of God. What is so great about Easter is that Jesus' victory is our victory. Because Jesus lives we know that we too will come back to life from the dead. That's great, it really is, but it's still in the future and so we might not appreciate this blessing a whole lot right now – like the five-year old whose father promises to buy him a car...when he turns sixteen. What good is that promise to the child in the meanwhile?

If that is what we think about Jesus' Easter promise, we'll want to pay close attention to the words of our text. The Apostle John writes: **"For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only He who believes that Jesus is the Son of God"** (I John 5:4-5).

John says that one blessing we enjoy right now as believers in Jesus is having overcome or conquered the world. That doesn't mean that we'll look like conquerors.

- I think of Stephen, the first martyr, he didn't look like a conquered as he was being stoned, but the peace he had and the joy in his heart that he knew Jesus was evident to all who witnessed what happened to him.
- Or think of the apostle Paul, standing in chains first before Felix the Roman governor of Judea and Samaria and later before his successors, Festus and Agrippa. He boldly spoke to them about the coming judgment. Luke records in the book of Acts that this scared the Roman ruler, while Paul spoke about it as if he was describing a coming reunion with an old friend (Acts 24).

This is what it means to conquer the world: you enjoy a genuine peace and calm even though your situation doesn't look all that great. The noted explorer Jacques Cousteau wrote at length about the dangers of atomic energy. According to Cousteau, we still don't have a safe way to dispose of the radioactive waste generated by nuclear reactors. Waste buried in a Washington state mountain cavern, for example, has leaked into the surrounding water table. When we read about the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan several years ago and its effect on their nuclear reactors we were again made aware of the grave dangers. Such depressing things can lead us to think, "If I wasn't a Christian, if I didn't have the hope of eternal life in a new world, I don't know how I could stand living in the rotten world we have right now. I would be burdened with so many worries and concerns.

But this is John's point in our text. We who have faith in Jesus have overcome the world.

- We have peace even when we read headlines and watch newscasts about senseless violence which seems to be occurring with ever greater frequency. It's not that we don't care, we just know that one day Jesus will come to free us from all this.
- Likewise when your doctor announces that you have some dreaded disease, you can respond as did the hymn writer Christian Gellert, who, when told he only had an hour to live exclaimed: "Praise God. Only an hour!"

Faith in Jesus also helps us overcome the world in our attitude about material wealth. Faith in Jesus helps us to adopt God's value system instead of the greedy attitudes of the world. It helps us to be content with what we have. John's point helps us realize how blessed we are when we find contentment in God's Word and the material wealth that God has given to us. Life really does become more enjoyable when you're not expending energy on worrying or complaining about