

“Resurrection Power: The Power to Overcome”

(A Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter)

Text: Acts 2:14a, 22-32 [Psalm 16; John 20:19-31; 1 Peter 1:3-9]

Subject: The Power to overcome flows to us from the Resurrection of Jesus.

Desired Response: Grab onto this power.

How To:

How Long: Put into practice now.

Sermon in a Sentence: “Just as He raised Jesus from the dead, so God gives His beloved children the power to overcome.”

Worship Theme: We worship God who gives us the power to overcome.

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Most everyone has heard or read the famous poem by Robert Frost entitled “The Road Not Taken”:

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And knowing I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

Frost's poem has inspired many people, including the late notable psychiatrist, Dr. M. Scott Peck, who became a follower of Jesus later in his life. Peck wrote several books that have helped many people.

Two of his most famous books include: *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth* and *People of the Lie: The Hope For Healing Human Evil*.

Peck examines the way God has created our human wills—free to make choices and free to receive the consequences of those choices. Peck asserts that the bending of a human's will to the leading of the Holy Spirit is the only way that a human can overcome the temptation to sin brought forward from Adam in each human being.

The Apostle Paul set forth these wise words in Galatians 5:16:

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Today is the Second Sunday in Eastertide. We began this season of the church year last week when we celebrated the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. But, the celebration of this important event in history does not end with Easter Sunday—at least it doesn't end for those churches that see value in connecting with our Christian past by following the pathway that countless millions of Christians have trod over the centuries. In this season of Eastertide, which stretches for 50 days from Easter Sunday through Pentecost, we have the opportunity to continue to examine the impact the resurrection of Jesus has on our lives as His followers.

In our first Scripture passage for today, we see the boldness of the Apostle Peter, as he stands before the Jews who have come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Festival of Weeks, or what the Greeks called "Pentecost." They have just seen the manifestation of the Holy Spirit come upon the Apostles as tongues of fire. Every person, no matter what his native language, has heard the gospel message in his own tongue. To say the least, this has startled those present. Peter jumps into the fray and offers a crucial explanation of what has taken place. Hear these words of Peter, recorded by Dr. Luke in Acts 2:14-32:

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

²² "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. ²⁵ David said about him: "'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, ²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

²⁹ "Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his

descendants on his throne. ³¹ *Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay.*

³² *God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.*

The Word of the Lord! (Thanks be to God!)

The resurrection of Christ completely forged the future of these disciples of Jesus who would become the first apostles of our Lord. In the days between the resurrection and this day of Pentecost, they have become spiritually alive, Holy Spirit driven, fearless proclaimers of God's Truth. That's the kind of power the resurrection had on their lives. And, make no mistake about, the resurrection has great power.

One of the more important aspects of the resurrection is expressed well in these verses from 1 Corinthians 15:54-57:

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The resurrection is the ultimate overcoming experience. Through His resurrection, Jesus overcame the power of death, the power of sin, and the power of Satan.

In John Milton's famous work, *A Paradise Lost*, sin, death, and Satan form an opposite expression in contrast with the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They stand as rivals for the hearts and minds of men. Milton had it right. While we don't seem to talk about sin much in the church today—at least across the wide spectrum of the Evangelical Christian church in the United States of America, the fact remains that sin is a powerful enemy.

It is my personal belief that one of the great deceptions of our age is for Christians to speak of God only in terms of His great love, His great compassion, and His great interest in the marginalized and downtrodden in the world, while completely ignoring His holiness, His righteousness, His disdain for sin, and His expected judgment for those who have failed to bow their knees in fealty to the Great King Jesus.

We must not fall into the trap of pretending that sin is normative for all people, including Christians. Now, don't misunderstand me. We Christians are all sinners saved solely by God's grace expressed to us in the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. We did nothing—absolutely nothing—to earn our salvation. It was a complete gift from God.

We Presbyterians of the Reformed Christian faith believe that before the foundation of the earth, God chose certain humans to belong to Himself. We do not understand how He made this choice or why He chose the ones that He did. Nevertheless, we believe that Scripture clearly attests to the fact that before the creation of the earth He chose certain humans to be a part of His eternal Kingdom.

We Presbyterians of the Reformed Christian faith also believe that at some point in their lives—or what we commonly refer to as "in due season"—God sends His Holy Spirit to each of these chosen ones to reveal to them the great gift He has given them through His Son's death on the cross and resurrection from the grave.

God’s tug on their lives is irresistible. In other words, those He has chosen cannot resist His choosing. By coming to understand what God has done for them, these chosen ones become transformed from mere creations of God to His dearly loved children.

John 1:12-13 put it this way:

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

And, as the oft-quoted 2 Corinthians 5:17 states:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

So, because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we chosen ones are new creations. But, we remain trapped in these sin-stained bodies. We continue to have the sin nature we inherited from our parents and they from theirs all the way back to Adam. Thus, we continue to sin, even though we are forgiven. As long as we are alive on this earth, we will battle sin.

However—and this is big—should we just passively accept our sinful behavior? As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 6:1-4:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have 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.

The resurrection of Jesus is a display of divine power over sin, death, and Satan. Thus, through the power of the resurrection, we can overcome sin, as well.

What I am trying to frame for you, when I put my thoughts into a sentence, goes something like this: “*Just as He raised Jesus from the dead, so God gives His beloved children the power to overcome.*”

If you will permit me, I would like to repeat that key sentence: “*Just as He raised Jesus from the dead, so God gives His beloved children the power to overcome.*”

The power of the resurrection is not constrained to the event itself. Rather, the power of the resurrection is given to those of us who believe in the life-transforming power of the living Lord Jesus Christ that we might apply that power to bring glory to God’s Name, to further the extension of His Kingdom here on earth, and to promote godliness in our own spiritual lives.

Our spiritual formation—our daily walk in the footsteps of Jesus—is constrained by sin. For while our sins are forgiven through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the sin nature remains in our mortal bodies. Thus, each day, we battle the annoying and inhibiting power of sin that would keep us from moving ever closer to where God wants us to be.

But, we do not labor against sin without aid from God. Through the Holy Spirit, the very power of the resurrection is applied to our four human modalities—heart, soul, mind, and strength; or, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical. Just as Jesus overcame sin, death, and Satan, by means of the power of His resurrection, we can overcome sin in our lives.

Will we continue to sin? Yes, of course we will. We still are bound by the sin nature until we pass from this life to the next. Can we put away many of the sins that bind the progress of our spiritual formation? Yes! Through the power of the resurrection, we can.

So, how do we begin to apply this miraculous power in our own lives? I have three steps that I want to suggest to you today.

First, today—don't wait even one other day—today, make a list of the sins that keep cropping up in your daily life. I have no idea what you might write on your list. And, you won't have any idea what your closest friend might write on his or her list either. But, each of us knows the sins that keep intruding into our lives and we need to write these sins down on a list.

Second, each morning, as you begin your day, look over that list of sins. Pray and ask God to help you apply the power of the resurrection to overcome one of those sins. I'm asking you to ask God for His help in tackling the abolishment of that list of frequent sins. Attack them in prayer one at a time. Specifically ask God to intervene when that particular sin comes knocking on the door of your life. Ask Him to help you overcome that sin. By so doing, you will raise your own level of consciousness regarding that sin.

Third, at the end of the day, take a look at your list of sins once more. This time make note of the sins on your list that jumped in front of you throughout the day. Pay particular attention to the sin for which you sought God's help in overcoming. Think about those times when that sin reared its ugly head and how God stepped in to help you overcome.

You may find that at first you have little success. But, the more you apply these three steps to the sins in your life, the more you will find that God is answering your prayers and giving you victory over them.

Keep in mind that as long as we are alive, we will always sin. But, most of us don't ever even try to do anything about the sins that keep popping to the surface of our lives. Just because we cannot eradicate all sin from our lives doesn't mean that we shouldn't be trying to do so.

Once again, here are the three steps:

First, make a list of the sins that keep appearing in your life. Second, at the beginning of each day, review that list and pick one sin. Then, pray, asking God to help you apply the power of the resurrection to overcome that sin. Third, at the end of the day, review the list again and make note of those times when the selected sin appeared and how God helped you overcome it.

I think it's high time that we Christians started to make much more of an effort to walk in the way of holiness. The more we emulate the very life of our Lord Jesus Christ, the more effective our testimony will be to those who need to come to know Him as the Savior and Lord of their lives. After all, we are His ambassadors. We ought to desire to be the very best ambassadors that we can be.

The Apostle Peter expressed his own urgings along the pathway of holiness in these words, found in 1 Peter 1:3-9:

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish,

spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

The truth from God's Word that I'm trying to share with you today on this Second Sunday of Eastertide, can be summed up this way: *"Just as He raised Jesus from the dead, so God gives His beloved children the power to overcome."*

The key to walking away from sin is to grasp the hand of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within all those who follow Christ, and allow the Spirit to lead the way out of sin's destructive pathway.

As we begin a new week in our walk with God, we will be assailed on all sides by temptation to follow our selfish, sinful human wills. Let us determine this day to hang on to the Holy Spirit and follow His leading. We will be so much better off if we do. Perhaps then, we will be able to say with Robert Frost:

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

"Just as He raised Jesus from the dead, so God gives His beloved children the power to overcome." Amen.