July 2, 2017
Fourth Sunday After Pentecost
<div align="center">"Victors, not Victims"</div>

Matthew 10:34-42

There are genuine victims in the world. Victims of crime. Victims of calamity and natural disaster. Victims of disease. People who through no choice, action or fault of their own suffer the effects of living in a world spoiled by sin. That poor couple on the news walking in the French Quarter last week were victims. They were just walking along minding their own business and evil found and attacked them.

A lot of other folks today, however, are taking the mantle of victimhood when they really have no business doing so, and then trying and wear it like some type of virtue. Go to a college campus these day and voice your rational opinion—something like there are only two genders; male and female—and you're likely to be met with indignant wailing at your horrible hate speech as coeds flee to their self-righteous safe spaces. How many of us lament ourselves as victims of the atrocity of world hunger, you know, like when you must wait a whole 120 seconds to microwave your hot pocket. Or my personal affliction, that little circle going round and round on the screen and forcing me to wait as I bypass free access to all the knowledge in the world to post a picture of my dog and facebook! Woe it me! I'm a victim of the internet!

That's not victimhood, no matter how much we my play it up that way in our mind. That's life. Some things take time. Some people have differing opinions. Sometimes things don't go your way and you have an off day. That's not being a victim. That's being alive.

But the most hypocritical victims around have to be…the Christians. Seriously, the Christians.

Think about it. In the past few years we've had a few high-profile cases here in the United States about governments clashing with Christians. There's that bakery in Oregon that wouldn't do a gay wedding cake and a photographer who wouldn't shoot one and a court clerk who would certify gay marriages. There are a whole lot of Christians who looked at these folks as if they were the poor victims of a corrupt government stomping on their religious freedoms.

Before that for years we've had religious symbols and the Ten Commandments being taken from public buildings and government insignias. How many Christians wailed about Christianity being victimized by the culture?

But the rubber really hits the road for each one of us in our own lives. Think about it. How often do we remain silent and not speak our Christian view because we're afraid we will be the "victim" of a rebuke? How often do we fail to admonish another Christian in love for sinful behavior because we might be the "victim" of their retaliation? How often do we just go along to get along, go with the flow, live and let live because to give action or voice to our faith might make some waves and we don't want to be a "victim" of the splash-back? Do we sin with the many rather than risk being a victim of ostracization by the crowd and left out and alone?

Especially in the midst of a culture that increasingly loves to play the role of the victim we need to get one simple truth straight: Christians are never victims. Victims are to be pitied. Victims are all about loss and failure and injustice. A victim is one who has been victimized, been beaten by some form of evil of the fallen world. This is impossible for those who are in Christ!

I'm not being stupid here. Of course, there are Christians who are victims of worldly loss. Christians are losing property, livelihood, families and lives from persecution in the Middle East

and elsewhere today. Here at home living and voicing your faith may cost you friends, opportunities, family and even cash and possessions. But when that happens we must know and believe that all of that is just life in Christ. We're not victims. Jesus was pretty clear about the cost of faithfulness.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

Don't hear these words of faith in Christ causing division and strife and demanding love of Him being paramount above all your other relationships as making you somehow a victim of Christ. Don't even receive these words of bearing your cross as making you a victim. We aren't victims. In Christ, we're victors.

That's why we follow Christ. That's why we love Him. He was rejected. He went to the cross. He died. But not as a victim. Jesus is the victorious Son of God. He marched through His life as the loving and serving, but always victorious Son of God. Nobody forced Him to the cross as a victim. He went to the cross willingly, intentionally, as our warrior Savior. He beat sin at the cross. He beat death through the empty tomb. Baptized into Christ His victory is ours today, and thus we are never, ever a victim…no matter what.

Yes, earthly life is tough, and yes there are earthly losses and pains and struggles of many different stripes. But forgiven in Christ we are never a victim of the world or its sin. We've already conquered it in Christ.

Having an early start to football analogies here, but consider Drew Brees, quarterback of the New Orleans Saints. Do you think he sees himself as a victim? Do you think he is looking over the opposing defense thinking, "Oh no. Look how big those eleven guys are and they all want to knock the stuffing out of me and take my ball! Poor me!" Or is he thinking, "I'm a player with top ranked skills, proven instincts and skills and I'm going to do my stuff and march to that end zone!"

This should be our attitude in Christ! We're winners! Christ Himself has done the victory for us. Christ Himself declares the victory belong to His faithful! *"Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."*

Faith in Christ is forgiveness of sins, peace with God and eternal salvation. Yes, faith in Christ brings the sword of division and opposition from the world, but is that anything compared to our reward? Our eternal and undeserved reward? Victory and the spoils are ours! Is there any victimhood at all in this? No! Not one little bit!

Suffering anything for the faith, any loss, even death; that's never being a victim. That's just life—life in Christ that is perfect, glorious and everlasting.

Does this mean we can't bemoan the losses, the times when the evil world does what it does and afflicts our life here in time? I'm not saying that. There is a place for mourning the fallenness of this world and its tragedies and injustices.

The point I'm making is that in Christ we don't face life as offended, helpless victims of that evil. Walking in Christ we look to the cross where sin and all if its ill effects have been brought naught in Jesus. We look to tomb which is empty save for our condemnation which lies powerless within. We look to the risen Christ reigning in glory, and know that His resurrection and victory is ours this very day and forever.

Walk through life as the baptized of God bearing your cross, never the victim, always the victor in Christ.

Amen.