

September 1, 2024  
Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost

“Victors, Not Victims”

Ephesians 6:10-20, Mark 7:14-23

Something that I find really frustrating about our present culture is this “virtue in victimhood” mentality that seems so prevalent. A whole lot of people seems aspire to be a member of an oppressed or victimized group because the thinking is that this gives them some sort of automatic nobility of some sort. This frustrates me not because I’m a white male and thus typically seen as the victimizer class, but because it totally ignores the definition of reality.

Victims are not noble; they are pitiable. The victim of an assault, injury or fraud is in need of aid, mercy and rescue. They’re needy, not noble. A victim might be somehow noble in the way they react to the circumstance, true. But victimhood in itself just means you have been made the object of suffering and loss—there’s nothing noble in that.

The way many Christians approach their walk in faith is by no means an exact parallel to this cultural phenomenon, but there are some similarities.

We confess that we are “poor, miserable, sinners” and this is true. In a way we are victims of the sinful condition we have inherited from Adam. St. Paul laments this condition in Romans speaking of how the good he wants to do he doesn’t do while the evil he doesn’t want to do he does. We are indeed afflicted.

But we’re trying, right? We love and believe in Jesus, right? We repent, attempt to put away our sins and better follow Christ...and that’s kind of a noble effort for someone who is so victimized by sin, isn’t it? We look at those who are comfortable in their sins, not practicing right faith, and it darn-tootin’ looks like we’re doing it better! Yes, we’re all sinners, victims of the curse of the Fall upon all creation, but we believe in Christ, so there’s got to be some virtue there, at least, you know, by virtue of Christ Himself? Isn’t there some nobility in our victimhood?

You are now probably expecting me to warn you about the sin of pride; the danger in raising yourself in your own eyes and thus stealing some of Christ’s glory. I wouldn’t be wrong to do so. But the point I want to make today is that if you are thinking at all the way I just described, you are ignoring the definition of reality you have in Christ! You. Are. Not. A. Victim.

*“Finally, be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might.”* St. Paul most certainly is not speaking victim language here. The picture he paints is not that of pitiful weaklings struggling against the much more powerful darkness that is victimizing us. We are in a struggle, yes. But one in which we are more than well equipped, we already stand victorious, and stand we do; together in Christ.

*“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.”*

Admittedly, the foe here sounds pretty daunting and, yes, he is. But get this picture right in your mind. St. Paul in this letter to the Ephesians has made clear we stand in Christ’s power and we do not stand alone. We are “fellow citizens with the saints,” “the household of God,” the very “body of Christ”. We stand united in Christ an army, outfitted with the divine gifts of God. We are not victims, we are victors in Christ possessing everything necessary to stand firm in our

faith as this war draws to its inevitable, determined end under Christ's reign with all enemies under His feet!

There is only one victim in this story, and it's not you. Victims are unjustly afflicted. We stood rightfully condemned in our sins. We were offenders, not victims. Christ in infinite love and mercy became THE victim, taking the entire curse for evil sin upon His innocent shoulders and bearing its wrath and condemnation in our place. But the victim became the victor in His resurrection to eternal life and all the gifts He gained now are ours with which to stand before God, virtuous victors by means of His Gospel!

We are called on to see ourselves this way because Christ has, in fact, made this our present reality both by His work and by the bestowing of this on us by Word and Sacrament. But this is also simply the best orientation to come at the challenges we face in a fallen world.

Victims generally are powerless and simply not up to the challenge of that which afflicts them. If this is how you see yourself in your struggle with sin and the dark forces at work against you, how will you perceive your chances of success? Not good! It's a defeatist approach to the battle and it puts all of the onus upon you, a poor, miserable sinner.

But when you perceive yourself rightly baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ and adorned in the armor of God, what is your success rate then? 100 percent! Defeat isn't an option at all. Even if you do fail in some skirmishes with sin, the outcome of the war is forever and always victory!

And I'm not going to break down every piece, the belt, the breastplate, the shoes, etcetera. I just want to point out that all of these are defensive, allowing you to withstand all the assaults of evil and stand your ground in Christ unto salvation. The one offensive weapon mentioned is "*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*" That Word is the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the truth that your falling to temptations to sin that looks so much like defeat to us, stands rendered impotent to condemn you in the cross of Christ. This sword parries all attacks of our own nature against us, and even rescues others from the enemy as this Gospel is lived and shared.

Now of course this wonderful reality does not remove the shame of our sins. They are indeed offensive to God and have no place with His children. We continually repent is sackcloth and ashes for the sin that still clings to our flesh. But we are not victims of it; we are victors over it in Christ. We repent, turn, work to put them away from us and stand fast in Christ against the darkness as the redeemed of God.

In your prayers, devotions and contemplations of God, have this attitude among yourselves that you are victors, not victims in Christ. I know, it may seem very strange because when you look at yourself and your success rate in battling sin, you seem wounded and failing, as if the darkness has mastery over you. But this is why we look to Christ. He lives. He reigns. He has been "victimized" by all the sins of the world already. There is nothing left for you. The risen Christ stands forever victorious, and you stand in Him, armored by His power, His victory.

Satan's flaming darts are his lies, denials of the truth of the reality Christ has created of you. Don't fall for them. Trust in Christ's victory and stand firm.

The truth is that there is indeed nobility in victimhood. But in the grand scheme of things there is always and only one noble victim, Christ the victor. He is noble and virtuous in that out of steadfast love He gave His life that you might live. Now He lives and you do also in Him. Stand fast in His victory and it is today and forever yours.

Amen.