

McCabe United Methodist Church

Message: Pastor Art Scanson

“It’s A Tough World Out There, But. . .”

John 16:25-33

A school teacher asked her students to write down on a card the one thing in the world they were most thankful for. Most of the children wrote down the usual, but one little boy in the class said that he was most thankful for his glasses. The teacher was quite impressed, as most young people are disgusted with wearing eyeglasses, but this boy seemed to be different. A rather mature child to appreciate how glasses helped him.

“Johnny,” she said, “I see that your glasses are the thing for which you are most thankful. Is there any special reason?”

Johnny answered, “Yes, ma’am. My glasses keep the boys from hitting me and the girls from kissing me!” Now here is a boy who has learned at an early age that life can be tough—that we all need all the help we can get.

Another example of a tough world is portrayed in the Broadway hit “Annie,” that follows the comic strip, Little Orphan Annie. The musical starts with the little orphan girl singing, “It’s a Hard-knock Life!” Even if you aren’t familiar with the production you can already relate to the title of that song. As we have all felt the painful hard knocks of life. So, if we use a little poetic license and some imagination, just maybe the story of Annie can be seen as a Christian allegory.

This little orphan girl in a tough hard-knock life is wanting so much to be loved and to be saved from that desperate situation. In spite of a situation where there seems to be no way out, yet Annie has hope! You can’t help but see that hope in her dream that someday her parents will come back to reclaim her. There are a number of imposters (in the Christian life - false prophets) who come to claim her. She is even kidnaped, with the intention of destroying her. But she is finally rescued by the love and strength of Daddy Warbucks!

In this troubled world (full of cancer, and other diseases, financial struggles, war, as well as broken dreams) we all have something of Annie in us. We are longing for someone to help us, to reassure us, to deliver us. We are listening and looking for some “good news.” Someone who will hold us up with their love and strength and see us through. My friends, that is

exactly what the Christian faith is all about! God through Jesus Christ is that source.

Let's read our scripture lesson for today - John 16:25-33.

Did you catch what Jesus said? "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." In that dramatic statement - there are three very powerful phrases.

First , In the world you have tribulation. To this we can all quickly agree. We know because we have experienced the difficulties of life. The newspapers and the television news have the troubles of the world blasting out at us. We can't seem to get away from it, it is as though we have a heavy blanket over us.

Are you aware that in America we spend more than three times as much for tobacco and more than six times as much for alcohol as we do for the entire religious enterprise?

Then there is the slumping economy. A business man was having a tough time and when asked his about his life he said, "I sleep like a baby. I sleep about two hours and wake up and cry!"

Personally we are aware of our own troubles, some are more pronounced now than in the past or vice versa. We do know about disappointments and disillusionment, hurt and heartache, pain and persecution, sorrow, sadness, and grief. Yes, I know this doesn't sound very good. And for some of us it is tougher than others. But all of this brings us to the second phrase.

Jesus says ". . .**But be of good cheer**" After all of the above this almost sounds absurd doesn't it? We might ask, "Why would Jesus say that? Could he really be serious? Does it mean that all we have to do is walk around with a perpetual smile, act jolly, and laugh it up, our troubles will go away? Of course not! In reality we know that, because Jesus himself was a "man of sorrows acquainted with grief." We might find some help with this by looking into the Greek New Testament. There the phrase that is translated here, "be of good cheer," may also be translated "be courageous!" Meaning, take courage. So to be of good cheer means to be courageous in the living of these days. Now, here is a reason – a special reason in fact – we can be courageous in the face of the troubles of the world. What a difference it makes when we face difficulties in life with a sense of confidence. And this brings us to the third part of our phrase.

Why?

For Christ has overcome the world! Jesus would ask us as he asked his disciples in the scripture lesson for today - "Do you now believe this?" Today, does it really have meaning for us or is it just rhetoric, or a clever cliché we can quote when we can't think of anything else to say? Do we really believe that Jesus Christ has overcome the world? The biblical answer, the Christian answer, is an emphatic and dramatic **YES!!** There is a parable of the Last Judgement that makes the point very well. It goes like this: *At the end of time, all the people who had ever lived were brought before the throne of God to be judged. However, they were not a submissive crowd. They were mumbling and grumbling among themselves. They had complaints to make.*

One group was made up of Jews who had suffered great persecution. Some had died in gas chambers and concentration camps. How could God judge them? What could he know of their suffering? "Who is God, that he should be our judge?" they cried.

Then there was a group of slaves who had suffered all kinds of indignities. There were homeless people who had no place to lay their heads. And there were poor folks – workers who had never been able to make ends meet. There were sick ones and sufferers of all kinds, each with a complaint against God!

"How could God judge us?" they thought. How lucky God is, to live in heaven where all is goodness and light – no tears, no worries, no fears, no hunger, no inhumanities.

So a commission was appointed to draw up the case against God! It was simple. Their conclusion was that before God could judge them, he must first endure what they had endured. So they judged God, and they sentenced him to live on earth as a man, to submit to the painful, agonizing, troublesome hard knocks of life. They shouted out:

Let him be born a Jew!

Let him be born poor!

Give him hard work to do!

Let him be rejected by his people!

Give him for friends only those who are held in contempt!

Let him be betrayed by one of his friends!

Let him be indicted on false charges, tried before a prejudiced jury, and convicted by a cowardly judge!

Let him be abandoned by his friends!

Let him be tortured!
Let him be lonely!
Let him die at the hands of his enemies!

As each group announced its sentence to God, cheers of approval went up from the throng. Then suddenly, there was quiet. No one moved. No one uttered a word or made a sound. For everyone knew that God already had served that sentence!

Dear friends! That is the very reason we can be courageous! -That is why we need not be afraid.

-That is why we can face the troubles of this world with strength and confidence.

-We can trust in God because God speaks not from an easy chair, but from a cross – as one who endured the worst the world can do and was victorious!

You know what? That is what the cross means. **It means God wins!** God's goodness cannot be defeated. God's truth cannot be silenced. And with that God wants to share that victory with us. It can't be said any better than Jesus said it, "*In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*"

Yes, in the world we will have troubles and trials, but we can be courageous. For Jesus Christ suffered the worst this world can dish out, and he overcame it. And he wants to share with us the Victor's crown! Thanks be to God!! AMEN?