

“The Father Himself Loves You,” John 16:25-33 (Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, January 28, 2018)

²⁵ “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸ I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”

²⁹ His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! ³⁰ Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

PRAY

We are working our way through the gospel of John on Sunday mornings at Grace. Today we come to one of those great passages in the Scriptures – John 16:33, and in the middle of that verse Jesus says, “In this world you will have tribulation”, but I’m just going to say “trouble” the rest of the time because that’s how I first learned the verse and it’s easier for me that way.

We will have trouble in the world, because this world is fallen and broken. It does not work the way God designed it. Relationships don’t work the way they should – we get hurt by other people, we experience neglect or even abuse. Our bodies don’t work the way they should – they get infected with disease, they break down, they wear out, they die. Communities don’t work the way they should – we have poor people when we shouldn’t, we have lonely people when we shouldn’t. And, of course, our own decision-making skills don’t work the way they should. It’s our cold-blooded choice, sometimes, to say or do something that wounds someone else.

“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” To “take heart” means to be bold, to be confident, to be courageous. This sermon is a talk on Christian courage. How can we face the big troubles and the small troubles this world will throw at us without falling apart? Without losing heart?

Two things: *first, we must know the love of the Father.* *Second, we must trust in the work of the Son.*

First, we must know the love of the Father. In verse 26, we read where Jesus says: “²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf . . .” Jesus here is talking about prayer. He’s saying the disciples will soon ask the Father in heaven for things: daily bread, understanding, strength to resist temptation, change in people’s lives. They will ask the Father directly.

Here I have to take just a moment and talk about the Christian understanding of God. We believe as Christians in a tri-personal God. You and I each have one personality. God has eternally existed in three persons: the Father, the Son (who became human and came to earth as Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. We call this the doctrine of the Trinity. Each person in the Trinity is God, each person is just as fully God as the other two, no one person is more God or more powerful or wiser than the other two. Yes, Christians don't worship three gods – we only worship one God. If you say, "J.D., I don't understand how that works. Explain it to me." I can't. I can't explain how 3=1. It is a mystery, but that is how Christians understand who God is. You can't be a Christian without this understanding of God. It's foundational.

In verse 26 Jesus wants to make it abundantly clear that "asking in Jesus' name" does not mean that the disciples have to go to Jesus first, ask him, get his approval, and then Jesus will relay their request to the Father. No, the disciples can go and talk to the Father directly. How? Verse 27: "for the Father himself loves you ..." You can go to the Father and talk to him and count on him for what you need because he himself loves you.

This was a revolutionary concept when Jesus stated it. Almost every other religion says that you just can't go directly to God and ask him for things. You must go through an intermediary. You need a priest of some kind to relay your prayers. You need a saint, or the virgin Mary because why in the world would God listen to you? But biblical Christianity is different and it says you can go to God directly because the Father himself loves you.

It's all too easy in a church like ours, with a pastor like me, to forget this – that the heavenly Father loves you. Why? Ironically, it's because I and the leadership of this church are so determined to be faithful to teach what the Bible says about sin, hell, and Christ.

We are bound and determined at Grace Bible Church to preach how we are all without exception sinners. We are determined to preach the evil of sin and how God will punish it with his wrath poured out on unrepentant sinners forever in hell.

And we are certainly determined to preach Christ, and that Jesus Christ, the son of God, and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. We deserve the ultimate death penalty – physical death and eternal, spiritual death – for our sins. But Jesus Christ came, and he lived the perfect life we did not live and on the cross he died the horrible death we deserved to die. God poured his wrath out on Jesus, instead of us. The technical term is "propitiation": Jesus propitiated, or turned away from us, the wrath of God. Nothing wrong with that – Paul himself said to the church at Corinth, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." 1 Corinthians 2:2.

But because we are so determined to preach and teach these things it can create the impression that there is some kind of disagreement or conflict inside the Trinity when it comes to us. It can create the impression that all of God doesn't feel the same way about sinners. This kind of emphasis, as right and necessary as it is in preaching, can create the impression that Jesus really loves you, but the Father only tolerates you. It can make it feel like the only reason the Father cares about you at all is because Jesus basically forces him to. If the Father had his way, he'd

pour his wrath out on us, but because of Jesus he can't. And if you had a difficult relationship with your earthly father, then it's possible to hear the preaching in our church and think of the Father in heaven as an abuser, ready to beat you again, but Jesus as the good, sacrificial older brother who steps in between the two of you and takes the beating for you instead.

But none of that can be true, because Jesus says, "The Father himself loves you." Jesus did not come to the Father in heaven ages ago and say, "Father, I know you want to send all those sinners to hell. I know you despise them. I know you can't stand them. But please let me go down there and save them. I love them, so please let me go."

That's not how it happened. John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." That means the Father came to Jesus and said, "I want these people to be mine, Jesus. I love them. I've chosen them. I want them to know me and love me. But their sin is in the way. Will you go and destroy the power of sin?" And Jesus said, "Yes, of course, for I love them, too."

There is no disagreement in the Trinity when it comes to us. The gospel is not, "The Father loves you only because Jesus died for you." The gospel is "The Father himself loves you." Full stop. It's not conditioned on anything, not even Jesus.

This is not universalism, the idea that everyone will be saved. "[F]or the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God." John 16:27. Salvation is found only in Christ, it is secured only by Christ, it is only through Christ we can come to the Father, and we must make the decision to trust him. *But salvation was the Father's idea! He's not a reluctant about it; he initiated it!*

What does this have to do with Christian courage? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.' ⁷It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Hebrews 12:5-11.

The Bible says that when pain and suffering come into our lives, we can be sure it is not God punishing us. Nor is it that God has forgotten about us or abandoned us or isn't powerful enough to do anything about it.

No – for the Christian, pain is allowed in our lives by God to train us. To discipline us, in the sense of strengthening us for service in his kingdom. But if you don't understand that the Father himself loves you, if you don't believe that all of God is for all of you, if there is this rotten spot in your understanding of who God is, then when trouble comes you won't be able to trust God completely with what's going on. And if you don't trust God in the midst of the pain you'll

become hard, bitter, angry toward him and everyone else in your life. Or, you'll collapse into utter despair and give up.

But knowing that the Father loves you and in his own mysterious and unknowable ways is training you and caring for you sustains you in the pain. Elisabeth Elliot, the missionary and writer, used to tell the story about a visit she paid to a sheep farmer, a shepherd, in the mountains of Northern Wales. Once a year this shepherd had to take the sheep and dip them in a vat of antiseptic. Otherwise, the insects would just eat the sheep alive.

The shepherd would grab the rams by the horns and throw them in the tank. When the sheep tried to climb out the side, the collie that worked for the shepherd would snarl and snap at them until they went back under the antiseptic. When the sheep tried to climb up the ramp on the other side, the shepherd took a wooden tool, like a rake, grab the horns of the ram with it, and then force the ram back under – eyes, ears, mouth, everything – for several more seconds. Only after all that did he finally let the ram walk up the ramp and out of the tank.

Elisabeth Elliot watched all that then said, “I’ve had some experiences in my life that have made me feel very sympathetic with those poor rams. I couldn’t figure out any reason for the treatment I was getting from the shepherd that I trusted. And he didn’t give me a hint of explanation. As I watched the struggling sheep, I thought ‘if only there was some way to explain.’ But such knowledge is too wonderful for them. It’s high and they cannot attain unto it. As far as they could see there was no point whatsoever.” And friends, so it is with us and the Lord. You will never know this side of heaven (and maybe not even on the other side) why it is that you’ve gone through your trouble. But if you don’t trust him, then when the trouble comes that is the very point where Satan will attack and try to destroy you. You must know the love of the Father to take heart in trouble.

But how can we really trust that God does love us like that? Second, we must trust in the work of the Son. Verse 33: “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have [trouble]. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

If you are to understand what Jesus is talking about in that verse, you have to think big. We might use the term “overcome the world” to describe someone who achieved some goal like losing weight or running a half-marathon. Jesus is talking about something much greater.

Do you know who really runs this world? We sing hymns like “This Is My Father’s World,” but you know who really runs it? The Bible tells us it’s Satan. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 he is called the god of this world.

That is why, when Satan took Jesus on a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and said, “I will deliver them to you if you will bow down and worship me,” it wasn’t an idle boast. Many theologians say that the reason Jesus refused the devil’s offer is because Jesus already had the kingdoms. That’s not true. If it were, then what Satan offered him would not have been a real temptation. The temptation lay in the fact that Satan did have the power to deliver the nations to him.

This world belongs to Satan, but Jesus has overcome the world. We see this all over the Bible as well. In John 12:31 he says, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.” In Mark 3, Jesus says he has entered the strong man’s house and bound him, and now he sets about plundering the strong man’s possessions. In Colossians 2:15 Paul says that Jesus on the cross “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame.”

Jesus came and Satan has been defeated, because Jesus has overcome the world. But what does that mean? One more verse: in Revelation 20:3 we read that Jesus has bound the devil so that he can deceive the nations no more.

The great power that keeps the devil in charge of this world is not that he can possess people with his demons and make them do crazy things. His great power is not that he can perform false miracles. His great power is not even that he can tempt us directly to sin.

His great power is that he can deceive us into thinking that the Father doesn’t love us and that this world is all there is. And if that is true, if this life we live is all that we get, then we will be terrified of too much trouble. Too much trouble means we lose everything we have and everything we are ever going to have. So we’ll do whatever we can to avoid it.

We will not speak out against injustice, against poverty, against racism, against sexual exploitation, against abortion, because we might catch some trouble, and life is too short for that. We will not be generous with our money, because we might need it to keep us out of trouble, so we’ll hoard or spend it all on ourselves. We’ll ignore our kids when they want us to play with them because it’s too much trouble, and this life is all there is, so I’ve got to enjoy my football game now! And we sure won’t tell anyone about Jesus. Not only is it too much trouble, but he will never be on our minds. After all, we’ll think we are the ones keeping us out of trouble, instead of remembering that Jesus is the one who sustains us in the trouble.

But then the Son came and did his work, and he crippled the devil’s ability to deceive us by proving in his resurrection that this life is not all there is. There is something beyond this world, and the Father loves us and will make sure we get there. John 16:28: “²⁸I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” This life is not all there is, for there is another world where the Father is! As C.S. Lewis put it, our great captain Jesus Christ punched a hole in the pitiless walls surrounding this world and bids us to follow him through.

Because of the Son’s work, we know there is such a thing as eternal life. We have another life, a better life, a more glorious life to come. And if that’s true, then whatever trouble we face on this planet can’t ultimately hurt us. As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: “So we do not lose heart [we have courage]. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

In this world you will have trouble. You will suffer and hurt and get sick and be betrayed and die in this world. But take heart, Jesus says, for I have overcome this world.

I want to give you two examples – one extreme and one practical – of how knowing Jesus has died for you and been raised from the dead for you will give you Christian courage. The first example is the extreme one. During World War II, Corrie ten Boom and her sister, Betsie, along with other members of their family, hid many of Holland’s Jews from Nazi attempts to take them to concentration camps. However, they themselves were discovered and taken to Ravensbruck, and on Fridays they had to endure the humiliation of being inspected while totally naked by a male, Nazi doctor. You talk about trouble in this world? That’s trouble. But here is what Corrie wrote about that experience. She said, “[I]t was one of these mornings while we were waiting, shivering, in the corridor, that yet another [passage from] the Bible leapt into life for me. ‘He hung naked on the cross.’ ... I had not thought [about that] ... The paintings, the carved crucifixes showed at least a scrap of cloth. But this, I suddenly knew, was the respect and reverence of the artist. But oh – at the time itself, on that other Friday morning – there had been no reverence. No more than I saw in the faces around us now.

“I leaned toward Betsie, ahead of me in line. Her shoulder blades stood out sharp and thin beneath her blue-mottled skin. ‘Betsie, they took *His* clothes too.’ Ahead of me I heard a little gasp. ‘Oh, Corrie. And I never thanked Him ...’” You see, if this world is all there is, then Corrie and Betsie are goners. They are in a death camp. Everything has been taken from them. But they knew this world is not all there is. There is more. They knew the Father loves them and that the Son has overcome the world and he was coming back for them. So they did not lose heart, did not collapse into despair. They had courage.

But often where we lose heart is not so much when we experience the trouble; we need Christian courage when we first start imagining what trouble might be out there waiting for us. The trouble we imagine probably will never come. But the worry all by itself causes us to lose heart.

Second example, more practical, from another woman not of the same caliber of Corrie ten Boom (but who is?): Beth Moore. I’m not a huge fan of hers, she does too much of the “God spoke to me” stuff, but I do think she has an insight into the fight that takes place inside a Christian’s heart, and she has a talent for explaining it. She said one time that her greatest fear was that her husband would leave her. That’s never happened, but that’s her fear. And she can’t help it but sometimes her mind just takes that fear and runs. She thinks out the worst possible scenario. In her mind, if her husband (Keith, I think, is his name) had a one-night stand, that would be traumatic. But worse would be if he fell in love with the woman. And worse than that, she says, is if the woman turned out to be half my age. And worse than that would be if Beth’s daughters liked and accepted this woman. She joked, “If Keith is going to cheat, the least we can do is all hate her.” And worse than that is if her grandchildren started calling this woman something like MeeMee or FeeFee.

She then said she lets her mind run to how this all would hurt her. She says if it happened she would be devastated and cry for months. She’d have trouble trusting people for years. And she’d never stop being nervous walking into Walmart for fear she’d run into FeeFee and have to talk to her. She imagines all that, and it would be bad.

Yet, she says, in the midst of the worry she does not lose heart, because no matter how bad things might get in this world, she knows this world is not all there is. By grace her mind turns back to the fact that Jesus has by his death and resurrection punched a hole in the walls of this world and he's going to lead her through. So she knows that whatever affliction she faces in this life is light and momentary is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Friends, that is Christian courage. Do you have it? And can you sing, "When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow; for I will be with thee thy troubles to bless and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress." Amen.