

These Windows Can Speak
Part 6: Jesus Christ, Victor
In Honour of Norma and Keith Hutchinson
Text: Hebrews 12:1-2
Preached by Bruce D. Ervin
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It's been a tough couple of weeks. For many of us, it's been tough. There have been deaths, and we have been grieving. Indeed, we continue to grieve. There have been challenges in some of our lives, and we have struggled. Indeed, the struggles continue. There have been some disagreements in our midst: not everyone is happy with this program, or that sermon, or some other aspect of our life together. And I suspect that the disagreements will continue.

So, yes, it's been a tough couple of weeks.

However, to put all of this in perspective, here's a letter from the weekly bulletin of The Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors. It was written by a British bricklayer to his employer:

Respected Sir:

When I got to the top of the building, I found that the wind had knocked some bricks off the top. So I rigged up a beam, with a pulley, at the top of the building, and hoisted up a couple of barrels of bricks.

When I fixed the building, there were a lot of bricks left over. I hoisted the barrel back up again and secured the line at the bottom, and then went up and filled the barrel with the extra bricks. Then I went to the bottom and cast off the rope.

Unfortunately, the barrel of bricks was heavier than I was, and before I knew what was happening, the barrel started down, jerking me off the ground. I decided to hang on!

Halfway up, I met the barrel coming down, and received a severe blow on the shoulder. I then continued to the top, banging my head against the beam and getting my fingers jammed in the pulley!

When the barrel hit the ground, it burst its bottom...allowing all of the bricks to spill out. I was now heavier than the barrel and so started down again...at high speed!

Halfway down...I met the barrel coming up, and received a severe injury to my shins!

When I hit the ground...I landed on the bricks, getting several painful cuts from the sharp edges. At this point, I must have lost my presence of mind, because I let go of the line.

The barrel then came down...giving me a very heavy blow and putting me in hospital.

I respectfully request sick leave.

You think *you've* had a rough month! It could be worse.

The late Dr. M. Scott Peck said it best: "Life is difficult." And even the difficulties of that bricklayer don't even *begin* to compare with those of the heroes of the faith whose stories we find in the 11th chapter of Hebrews. Talk about having a cross to bear! *They* sure did. And so do we. The path of faithfulness necessarily passes through the dark valley of suffering.

It's like the words of the African-American spiritual:

Nobody knows the troubles I've seen.
Nobody knows but Jesus.
Nobody knows the troubles I've seen.
Glory, hallelujah!

It's a song of lament, of course, but it's an ironic lament because it ends with that phrase, "Glory, hallelujah." What's so glorious about the troubles that we've seen? Well, nothing, of course. What's glorious is that Jesus has seen even *worse* troubles – that's why he understands the troubles that I've seen – Jesus has seen even worse troubles, and he's emerged victorious on the other side! In the words of theologian Gustav Aulen, the one whom we follow is "Jesus Christ, Victor."

"For the sake of the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God."

That's the way that the author of Hebrews (12:2) puts it. Jesus Christ has endured a level of suffering that you and I can't even begin to imagine! Yet he has conquered it all! Crucified on a cross. Pierced through with nails and sword in his two hands, his two feet and his side. Left there to bake in the sun. But not even that level of suffering can thwart the will of God. Crushed down to the depths of suffering and despair by the powers and principalities, God has highly exalted him, and given him the name that is above every name: Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Creator (see Philippians 2:5-11).

Jesus Christ, Victor. The central theme of the Christian faith is symbolized beautifully in the window given to this church by Norma and Keith Hutchinson; given in celebration of their 50th wedding anniversary. Anyone who has the grace and courage, the patience and love to survive and *thrive* through 50 years of marriage is a victor in my book! Good for them! Good for *all* of you who've made it that far and beyond. It's not an easy journey; but to walk through the years hand in hand with your beloved, it is a *joyous* journey!

The Hutchinson window juxtaposes the Jerusalem Cross with a palm branch. Here again we really need that projector and screen which the Worship Committee has periodically discussed and which perhaps will someday be installed here in the Sanctuary. Just imagine the window projected on the two

screens that might be hanging on the wall above the doors. In the window's centre there's the Jerusalem Cross: a large cross surrounded by 4 smaller crosses. 5 crosses in total, symbolizing the 5 wounds inflicted upon Jesus when he was crucified. But the crosses are empty; the body is gone. That alone suggests Jesus' victory over the fatal wounds. The point is reinforced by the palm leaf: a symbol of life and victory which celebrates Jesus' victory over death. The man has been raised from the grave!

Jesus Christ, Victor. But not *only* Jesus. We too are victors. I love the way it's expressed in the hymn *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*: "Ever singing, march we onward, victors in the midst of strife." Some newer hymnals have tried to tone down the militaristic language and it reads: "Ever singing, moving forward, nice people in the midst of a few challenges," or something like that. *Voices United*, thank God, mostly stuck with the traditional words. They managed to bury *Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus* and *Onward, Christian Soldiers* because they were somehow too militaristic, but unlike some new hymnals they didn't airbrush away all of the strong, challenging hymns and language. Even added a few new ones: "We are marching in the light of God, we are marching in the light of God."

Jesus Christ, Victor. We are victors in the midst of strife. And Keith and Norma, who are listening to this on CD, we know that you know something about persevering and overcoming through strife because of the kind of summer that you're having. Keith has fallen a couple of times, and there've been some complications, but he's on the mend now (with the help of his good nurse and wife, Norma) so Keith and Norma we continue to hold you in our prayers and we look forward to seeing you again in the fall.

Being declared a victor doesn't mean that it's all going to be easy from here. There will be more tough weeks. There will be more struggles. Divisions will continue and will have to be worked through: in the church, in our families, among friends. Division and struggle is also part of the Christian journey. In today's gospel lesson (Luke 12:51), even Jesus said, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!" Before there can be peace there sometimes has to be conflict and division. The surgeon's knife must sometimes cut through layers of infected tissue before the body can be healed. Sometimes wounds must be inflicted before health can be restored. Healing is the goal. Peace is the goal. But sometimes there must be strife along the way.

It's like the final year of World War II. The crucial victory was won on D-Day. Once the Allies managed to get off the beaches and fight their way inland, those Germans who had the eyes to see knew that the war was lost. But there was quite literally a hell of a lot of fighting still to be done. The Allies were victors, yet still in the midst of strife. For the Canadians especially, those who proudly wore the maple leaf that is so prominent in the Hutchinson window, for the Canadians especially, the horrors of the Antwerp campaign still lay ahead before the Netherlands could be liberated, and the scourge of Nazism could be

removed from all of Europe, and the victory won in principle on the beaches of Normandy could be proclaimed in fact.

So it is with us. The victory has been won in principle. When the crucified Christ was raised to newness of life on Easter morn, the victory was won in principle. But there's still some tough slogging that lies ahead. Like the heroes of the faith who have gone before us, we still need to be travelling lightly and ready for action. Therefore, laying "aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely...let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2a). As you do so, know that "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." For, with St. Paul, "I am sure that neither death, nor life...nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). Amen.