

The Baptismal Prayer 3: Power Strength And Victory

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Our hearts may be open to your words, to your presence, to your sacrificial death on the cross, and by reason of that to one another.

We ask in your name. Amen. Thank you. There's something very new in church this morning, something that will mark St. John for the rest of time, as long as this building stands.

And I'd love to ask you how many noticed it. I'm not going to ask you, but I'll tell you.

In the back corner there's a new window. And the window is part of the themes from St. John's Gospel, I am the resurrection and the life.

And no doubt you didn't notice it because you weren't expecting something different. And I'm afraid that the same thing may happen to my sermon, so I thought I'd use that as an illustration.

[1 : 32] This is a transition Sunday in the life of the parish.

That is, there are people coming who are coming to live in Vancouver and to work and study in Vancouver, and some of them may be here this morning, and there are people here who will, after this Sunday, leave Vancouver and go to other places.

So that process is almost an invisible process. We don't notice it, and we need very much to notice it because it's part of our life together as a congregation that we acknowledge that.

We will acknowledge it in a way at the end of the service when we have a commissioning for Noriko Inagaki and Tana Clark. David and Bronwyn Short have repented and returned to Australia.

But the word is they'll come back. So they're there, Ernie's on holiday. You probably know that all but the last \$40,000 or \$50,000 is in hand to complete the restoration of the church hall next door, but the actual work is mostly invisible work that's going on now in terms of planning and doing the thing you do with contractors and people to get work done.

[3 : 11] And that won't start for a while yet. The August Sunday, in which you were all asked to write something about your experience of St. John's on Sunday, August the 16th, you've got a number of manuscripts in, and there are probably some that are lurking.

You don't have to worry about it being a completed work of literary genius. All it has to be is something stretched on a piece of paper, and it will no doubt be valuable and be edited into what we want to put together from the various opinions.

And the reason we did it is because you have to be very mindful that there is a lot of people in church, and every one of them has a completely unique and different story about what it means to them to be in church or to be here.

And some of them are angry, and some of them are joyful, and some of them are hurt, and some of them are healed, and some of them are sick, and some of them are grieving, and some of them are preparing for marriage, and some of them are preparing for memorials, and it's all very different between people.

And you need to be very much aware of people. I know a lot of you have got to the point where you avoid the coffee hour.

[4 : 37] I don't know, but what is part of the service, and that you should be there, because you no doubt have a ministry to other people, and other people to you. And that's one of the venues we have by which you can, in part, exercise that.

It's, you know, because we live in a world in which the processes of depersonalizing are going on very rapidly, and we live in a world where you don't have to pay attention to the particularity of people so that they become a kind of blur in your sight.

In the congregation of Christ's church, it's very important that we take people, individual people, without necessary concern for rank and wealth and prestige and learning, but just as people, that we take them seriously and get to know them and share with them, because we very much need each other.

We need the support that we can give to one another. Part of that support is to pray for one another, and you may not know quite how to go about praying for one another, and so I've picked up on the prayers for the person who's beginning their Christian life in baptism, the adult, and I've looked at two of the prayers, and this morning I want to look at the third, and it would be helpful to me if you turn to page 536 in the prayer book, and there you'll see the prayers for the person who is about to be baptized.

The third of those prayers is the one I want to look at this morning, and it reads, Grant that he or she or they may have power and strength to have victory and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh.

[6 : 44] Because I'm of a peculiarly introspective nature, which I guess you all know and suffer from, when I read that, the first thing I think of, the thing that comes out in crescendo is the world, the flesh, and the devil.

And I spent most of the week trying to expand on those topics and think how I could illuminate them so that they would stand out before you, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

But then I noticed, I wish it was drawn to my attention, you might say, that there are three other things in there that are vastly more important.

Power, strength, and victory. And what we're here to do this morning is not to celebrate the world, the flesh, and the devil, or to introspectively look into it, but we're here to celebrate power, strength, and victory.

And to pray for one another that in the course of our life, our lives may be marked, not by the triumphs of the world, the flesh, and the devil, but by the reality of the power and the strength and the victory that is ours.

[8 : 18] So, think about that. And now, contrary to what I've just said, I'm going to tell you about the world, the flesh, and the devil. But only briefly, I hope.

The world, and I know you'll misunderstand this, but there's a wonderful example of the world in that great racket that's coming from downtown in terms of the indie race that's going on here in Vancouver.

When you pray for somebody being baptized, you talk about the plumps and vanities of this present world. Now, the plumps and vanities of this present world are enormously sophisticated.

Psychologically, they're enormously important. Emotionally, they're enormously fulfilling. But they still are part of the illusion which the world creates.

And were you to become totally absorbed in this particular illusion, then you might lose valuable time and energy which belongs to your one little life in something that doesn't have any ultimate eternal spiritual consequences.

[9 : 38] And that's what the world does to us. It creates an absorbing illusion. It gives us emotional release. It probably is better than fighting in the streets.

It's probably better than rioting or smashing windows or looting. It's all organized expenditure of massive amounts of energy for a whole lot of people and a sense of effort and a sense of technical perfection and a sense of pride and a sense of wonder and a sense of adventure.

All those things are there in the Indy car races, I'm sure. But they also are not going to be there tomorrow. And having been through the Abbotsford Air Show three weeks ago and now the Indy races, we're going to be breathlessly waiting for what other great excitement might sweep through our city and catch us up in the enthusiasm for it.

And that's the way the world works. And all I'm saying to you is that you have to be a little bit discerning about it because it does absorb a lot of your time and energy.

And it's in great danger of you spending the whole of your life caught up in things which are basically, as the prayer book says, the vain pomps and vanities of this present world.

[11 : 10] They are ultimately empty. Only in the sense that the book of Ecclesiastes, the author would come to the Indy races in Vancouver, watch them carefully.

And as he walked away from them, scuffing his shoes in the dirt, would say, as he said of almost everything else in human experience, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

And he would be right, you know, that there isn't any eternal significance. And if that worldly illusion robs you from an encounter with something of eternal significance, then it's wrong for that reason.

And that's the world. The flesh is different. This is a battle that you have, all of us have in our lives.

And the flesh stirs up in us great desires, voracious desires, desires that have to be met, desires that we were willing to throw away everything to fulfill those desires.

[12 : 19] And the nature of the flesh is that it makes great promises of fulfillment, which promises it can't keep.

It just can't, that's all. I leave you to meditate on that. But basically, the promises that the desires make, the desires that draw us, the desires that make us willing to throw away almost everything, those desires ultimately are not fulfilled.

And so we have accepted a promise which cannot be kept. And so we pray for one another that we will not be, that we will have victory and triumph in the power and strength which Christ gives against the world and against the desires of the flesh.

Now again, there are powerful motivators. And the only ultimate fulfillment of our desires is in knowing God.

The third thing that you have to look at is the devil. That is, we want power and strength to have victory against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

[13 : 47] And basically, all you need to recognize is that what the devil does is he lies. You heard Rachel read about that in John chapter 8 this morning, and that the devil is the father of lies.

And that we reject the person who tells the truth. The devil creates for us a construct of lies in which we live our lives.

And so, you see, the difficult part of it is that it's, that the world, the flesh, and the devil occupy most of our lives.

That's how we live our life. And we need power and strength to have victory over them. Now, you know that, that this is a, this is a, this is a great city we live in in Vancouver, and we have, we have a lot of things going for us.

And, and I think that rather than have victory over these things, what we really try to do is disguise the defeat we're suffering at the hands of these things.

[15 : 07] Disguise the, the fact that we are captivated by the world, we are just barely by our fingernails in control of inordinate desires, and that, by and large, we acknowledge the great convenience of the devil's lies, and that we, we live that way.

And most, and you can live a kind of intellectually acceptable, socially acceptable, morally acceptable life, but still the heart of your life is robbed by the fact that you are in subjection to, that we are in subjection to, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Well, that's, that's what we're praying for. Now, what, what, the sum total of it is this.

This is where it comes down to the kind of line drawn in the sand, and that is that it says two things to us.

It deceives us about the nature of sin, and, and so it deceives us about the necessity of Christ's death on the cross.

[16 : 26] We conclude that that wasn't necessary, and it deceives us about the fact of Christ's authority and lordship in our lives.

We didn't need him to deny, to die for us. We don't need him to have rule over us. And, and that's basically what happens.

And when you pray for one another that you may have victory, that you may have the power and strength and victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil, then that's, that's what's intended, is that, that which you could never do for yourself, God has done for you in Jesus Christ by his death on the cross.

And, uh, Jesus is Lord, and the business of our lives is to live in obedience to him, in practical, personal, daily, corporate obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Lord. We've got to work that out. That's why we need to know one another. That's why we need to pray for one another. That's why we need one another to help us, uh, overcome the illusions of the world, the desires of the flesh, and the lies of the devil, which are everywhere.

[18 : 01] We breathe that stuff all the time. there's a, there's a Roman Catholic catechism, which is called the Dutch catechism, and it, it, it illustrated in a, in a paragraph really how deceptive sin is, and that we don't recognize the reality of it.

And, uh, it said, in our world, sin is regarded in the first instance as a cog wheel that is missing in the whole structure of human society, and that cog wheel was replaced by Marxism, uh, getting people motivated so that the machine works.

Uh, then it says another way sin is regarded in our world is it is an imperfection of a free creature that can be corrected by intelligence and energy, that that's all that sin is.

It's, uh, it's an imperfection. which can be corrected by intelligence and energy. And that's a very prevalent view of sin in our world today. The third view, it says, is that sin is a transgression against a cold and lofty law by which we come under condemnation.

And that's the way a lot of people relieve themselves from ever going to church and being subjected to what you're being subjected to right now. Uh, because the law is so high so lofty, so impersonal, so condemnatory that it is impractical for human beings to try and relate to it.

[19 : 39] And, uh, a lot of people believe that. There must be something else, they say, but they don't want to find what that something else might be. need. The fourth thing is that sin is basically an offense against fellow human beings.

And if we just treat fellow human beings a little better, then sin will be overcome. But you see, all of those are partly right.

But all of them fail to recognize that the heart of sin is the rejection of the love of God, which has been expressed in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

And they tend to say that wasn't necessary. And so, and the fact that Jesus is risen and is Lord, that's not necessary either.

that they fail to see that sin is an offense against the profound love of God, which has been revealed to us and made available to us by Christ's death on the cross.

[20 : 51] And that's why, you see, a life which is enslaved to the world, the flesh, and the devil is the is a waste of time.

That's all there, you see, you're just blowing your time. At my profound and great age, which I feel I'm having my nose rubbed in these days, I, you become aware of how much time you waste in your life and how much the dominance of the world, the flesh, and the devil have consumed energies over the years.

So, I want this to be very personal and, because Ben Thomas has made known to the whole congregation that he's suffering from a brain tumor and that his expectations aren't very good and that he has a real battle on his hands and he's asked us very publicly to pray for him and he's in a very difficult place.

How do we pray for him? We pray that he may, in the words of this prayer, that we grant that he, Ben Thomas, may have power and strength to have victory and to triumph against the lies of the devil, the illusions of the world, and the desires of the flesh.

You know, all those could infinitely compound the fact of his own personal, physical suffering. life. And we need to pray for him that in this particular and desperate situation in which he finds himself, that he might have that kind of power and strength to have victory in all those areas.

[23 : 08] You see, the world has certain, has a way of creating the illusion that this is all there is.

And it isn't. The flesh has the ability to generate desires that will overcome the process of inevitable suffering and sickness, which is part of our human life here on earth.

And to think that we can bypass that, which we can't. And the devil can lie about the fact of the resurrection and the hope of the resurrection.

That's why it's very practical to pray for one another in these terms. And that's why I God, I want you to recognize the responsibility we have to pray.

Now, let me just give you these few verses to remind you of the fact that all the way through the New Testament, this is a consistent theme. Remember how Paul ends Romans chapter 8, a tremendous chapter, by saying, in all these things we win an overwhelming victory through him who has proved his love for us.

[24 : 40] That's the power and strength to have victory. Or you can read in 2nd Corinthians where Paul says in the midst of his own considerable suffering, thanks be to God who leads us wherever we are on Christ's triumphant way.

In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul concludes by saying, be strong, not in yourselves, which is what we are tempted to do.

Be strong, not in yourselves, but in the Lord, in the power of his boundless resource, that you may be able to resist evil in its day of power.

To have power and strength and victory. The verse which I read at the beginning of the service, and these are all from J.B. Phillips translations, so they may sound slightly different to you, but 1 John chapter 5 verse 4 says, for God's heredity within us will always conquer the world outside us.

You see, it's so easy to be tempted into thinking that the problem is out there, and Christ says, no, the big problem in your life is in here, and if you won't deal with that, you can't deal with that.

[26 : 14] And so, he says in the epistle of John, God's heredity within us dealing with this will always conquer the world outside us.

In fact, this faith of ours is the only way that the world has been conquered. Otherwise, the world's victory is complete over us.

Who could ever be said to conquer the world in the true sense? Except the man who really believes that Jesus is God's Son. And again, in Ephesians, Paul prays for the Christians and says, I pray that out of the glorious riches of his resources, he will enable you to know the strength of the Spirit's inner reinforcement in the ongoing battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil, that Christ may actually live in your hearts by faith.

Well, there you are. That's how we're to pray for one another. That's why we need to be in fellowship with one another. That's why we need to be close enough to one another to help each other smash the illusions of the world, to help each other when we're caught in the desires of the flesh, to help one another when we are deceived by the lies of the devil, and to help one another appropriate that which the New Testament promises and St.

Paul articulates, that there is power and there is strength and there is victory that belongs to us, and it belongs to us because Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross what we could not do for ourselves, and Jesus Christ by his resurrection is Lord, and the business of our lives is to live in obedience to him, not in slavery to the world, the flesh, and the devil.

[28 : 32] Amen.