

I could almost taste VICTORY! Several weeks ago I was making plans with my brother to golf with him over vacation. Turned out that Michigan Lutheran Seminary, my alma mater, was still having their annual fundraising tournament that weekend we were going to be in Michigan. Plans were set. Would be fun to spend some time with my brother ON THE GOLF COURSE. An added bonus: he is pretty good at golf. Over the past couple of weeks he had posted some scores: 3 over par, 5 over par, 2 over par. It was getting better and better. And so were my dreams of winning. I could taste VICTORY!

What would it take to win? Well, In the world of professional sports, athletes constantly work with sports psychologists to train their bodies to respond successfully during competition and to perform the way they envision victory. And it works...at least that is what I have been told. Well, I guess it does work for me as well. If I picture myself hitting the golf ball into the pond, that is exactly what I do. If I see myself shanking the ball 50 yards to the right of the green, that is exactly what I do. In regards to the tournament I would love to tell that the power of positive thinking carried us on to victory, but... Let’s just say no one on our team was able to think positively enough!

Every day we face our own spiritual competition against temptation, the devil and his evil cohorts, and the guilt and shame. How do you prepare? What do you do to ensure victory? As we “wonder about God” as he is portrayed in the Apostles Creed, we envision the VICTORY of our Savior Jesus Christ from the foot of his cross on Mt. Calvary and consider the impact it has on us still today. We pray the Holy Spirit will train our hearts and minds to VISUALIZE OUR KING JESUS’ VICTORY. In doing so we will be able to respond positively, confidently and successfully to the battles we face as Jesus fills us with Peace & Hope, Strength & Power.

From our view of the cross we can understand why it was difficult for certain groups of witnesses to think positively about the battles they were facing as they watched Jesus die. Each had had their lives touched in a unique, special, powerful way. Think of the memories that flashed before their eyes. Several times in Scriptures Jesus cited the arrival of his kingdom. The expectations were high and highly anticipated.

Think of the women:

Consider just a couple of the special moments that must have flashed before their eyes as they stood there at Jesus’ feet on Mt. Calvary: 1) witnessing or at least hearing about the raising of Jairus’ daughter; 2) hearing about the experiences of Mary & Martha. They could almost taste victory that Jesus had predicted as they had watched him work over the course of his ministry

How helpless & hopeless they must have felt from their view of the cross.

The disciples:

Consider just a couple of the special moments that must have flashed before their eyes as they stood there at Jesus’ feet on Mt. Calvary: 1) turning water into wine 2) amazing catch of fish; 3) demons exorcised. They could almost taste victory that Jesus had predicted as they had watched him work over the course of his ministry.

From the view of the cross was there a sense of hopeless and helpless? No doubt. Perhaps there was even a sense of disappointment and frustration on the part of the disciples. After all they had been through and the excitement of what Jesus had promised and then he was gone!

The soldiers:

For the soldiers perhaps there was a sense of satisfaction. Another wanna-be out of the picture. They had done their job. Time to move on. This

Jesus guy was just hoax? Just a bunch of propaganda. How could anyone walk on water? It is impossible to feed over 5000 people with a few loaves of a bread and couple of fish. Even his own people were mocking him and ridiculing him.

You/Me:

Where we do fit in among the crowds? Don't we find struggling ourselves in each camp...hopeless when dealing with tough issues, helpless when things don't seem to be turning around, frustrated when God allows us to suffer, disappointed when things didn't go the way we thought was best. Wondering when God is going to step in get things back on track. The battles rage on and on in our lives and it becomes overwhelming when we fail to VISUAL JESUS' VICTORIES. It is at these points when we need the spoils of HIS VICTORIES, the spoils of spiritual peace and certain hope, the strength and power which only he can provide.

Thankfully, through the eyes of the faith, though, we remember His victories:

the times he empowered us to overcome temptations

the times we learned some valuable lessons,

the times when we overcame guilt/shame through his unconditional forgiveness which left us speechless and with tears in our eyes.

Power and peace come from the work Jesus accomplished by fighting our battles for us. Taking on human nature he exposed himself to a sinful, evil world and took on human traits, qualities and characteristics in order to accomplish his divine mission. Throughout the Old Testament God's messengers painted a picture what his people ought to expect and anticipate. This is what we see on that gratefully good Friday. Not only do we appreciate what we see and cherish his amazing love, we pray for strength to model him as we face our own battles.

We see Him clothed...

with humility in order live the perfect life we would never be able to present to our Creator.

in the guilt and shame of all humankind

in blood and in the wrath of our God so we could survive the day when we will stand before him on J-Day and celebrate

We see Him armed with the Sword of the Spirit...as he wards off the final, full-frontal attacks by the devil in his last, desperate attempts to destroy God's prized, crown of creation

as he finishes fulfilling all the OT prophecies from the cross

Even as he is dying we marvel at his presence of mind to watch over his flock with vigilance...

To care for his loved ones and their futures in this life and the life to come

To warn them of the dangers that lurked around every corner

To teach them the extent of his grace and mercy.

Envision His Victory: He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell, on the third day he rose from the dead!

Envision His Victory: This is what God has promised. This is what Jesus assured his disciples well before that final victory march. John 16:33 (NIV84) "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. God spoke through the psalmist as He promised, 6 "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

VISUALIZE the Empty Cross where the punishment for sins was paid. VISUALIZE the empty tomb where death was destroyed. Every Sunday for thousands of years Christians have gathered to acknowledge and celebrate these victories which

give us peace and hope, which empower us to fight our daily battles through the strength our victorious King gives.

Visualize the Victory of Your King...his victory is your victory...through him you overcome all things as he fills you with peace and hope, power and strength to persevere.

This is why the write to the Hebrews directed the early Christian Church,

22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

VISUAL HIS VICTORIES and be filled with peace & hope and supplied with power and strength for he has redeemed you, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won you from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that we may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. Amen.