*Sermon Text for October 27, 2013*

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Isaiah 41:1-10, John 16:25-33

“Take courage!”

This is one of those Sundays were you have an embarrassment of choice from which to preach. Reformation Sunday is today, a Sunday when we celebrate those reformers who went before us, from Luther to Calvin to John Knox who led the Protestant Reformation in Scotland. These are people who took courage against the establishment and stood for the sovereignty of God, the fact that God is in control over all things. People who saw Scripture as authoritative over and against tradition and the voice of experience or individuals. The reformers had the courage they needed to speak out on behalf of theological truths that they felt were being eroded.

We could address All Saints Day and how many of our faithful went to be with the Lord this year. People, many of whom fighting bravely against age which was claiming their bodies and minds or disease that had invaded their bodies. We lift up those who went before us as Saints, as the 5th verse of the hymns we will sing tells us: And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,

 steals on the ear the distant triumph song,

 and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong

But as is my practice, let’s look at Scripture and see how we can use the words that Jesus leaves with his disciples and the words that the Prophet Isaiah leaves with the people of Israel to take heart, and to take courage as we face our own lives in this world that is shockingly similar to the world in which the reformers face.

In John 16 we find the disciples and Jesus still huddled together as Jesus is talking to them for the last time before he is taken away from them. They need courage in the state in which they find themselves and Jesus give them just that. Turn with me will you to the Gospel of John chapter 16.

When I read John 16:33 it always strikes me as one of the most powerful verses and certainly one of the central witnesses to Christ in all of Scripture. Jesus is talking with his disciples, this is a conversation now that has lasted over 2 ½ chapters. Basically it has been a monologue with Jesus talking and the disciples listening. I hope over these chapters and these weeks you’ve been able to see why the disciples needed a talking to. They were hours from the time that their leader was going to be taken from them, hours from the time that Jesus would be arrested and as Jesus foretells in these verses they, the disciples would be scattered to their own homes, leaving Jesus alone. The disciples needed courage in order to face the world out there as a group, only eleven of them and surrounded by a hostile people and a hostile world. The disciples needed courage.

But not only did the disciples need courage, Jesus, their leader, their teacher, master, and Lord needed courage. He was facing a very certain future- immanent death. He was hours away from being hung on a cross, hours from being abandoned by his best friends, hours from the most painful experience in his life. But how does he address his disciples? He tells them, not they comforting him, but he tells them: “Take courage, I have conquered the world.” The one about to be tortured on a across and knows it tells his disciples “Take courage, I have conquered the world.” I know that resonates for many of you that are facing now, have faced, or possibly will face what Luther called the dark night of the soul, and yet being able to hear the one who had the most painful experience one could have, to hear him say: “Take courage, I have conquered the world.” What gall, what confidence, what brashness.

Where does Jesus get this sense of certainty? Where does it come from? Well the easy answer is that he is after all God and he really doesn’t have much pressure because he knows how everything will end up in the long run. Well isn’t that the key. Not the being God part but the part of knowing how everything will work out. Jesus could look back to Isaiah 41 and recall the words of Scripture that tell him in the words of his Father, Almighty God: Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God, I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

He could also be encouraged with his disciples because just like in Isaiah when the going go tough the people of Israel banded together and look at vs.6 which is so central in being able to have courage when you face scary situations: “Each one helps the other, saying to one another: Take Courage”. That’s teamwork. It reminds me a lot of the Dallas and Eagles game last week.

Jesus knew, because the Scripture told him that ultimately God is in control, God is ultimately victorious, that God wins. Jesus gets his courage here in this verse from the fact that he knows even if his best friends, even if his own brother James, even if all the people he loves the most desert him or as he states in these verses in John even if they scatter from him: Jesus states prophetically and courageously “Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me.” This is the source of the courage of Christ, he knew that even if everything was falling down around him he still was not alone, he was never alone because the Father is with him. This is courage.

Courage comes from standing on the solid ground and knowing that the Father is by your side. Courage is being able to say to the 11 disciples who are in the midst of doubt and controversy, take courage, I have conquered the world. Courage is being able to live your life under the graces of a victorious Savior instead of under the precariousness of a luring world.

There are many things that can cause us to lose courage. Some are very good reasons. The death of a loved one, the sudden diagnosis of a sickness, the breaking down of a relationship, all of these are common reasons for the loss of courage today. I could go on but I don’t think I need to, you know where I am going with this. When we find ourselves overwhelmed and numbed by the reality of this world and this life it is hard to take courage.

Take courage, Jesus tells us here today, right now to take courage. He doesn’t say put on a happy face and pretend that nothing ever happened. That is not Jesus’ message. Some translations state: be of good cheer. That is not what the Greek says. The literal Greek says “harden your hearts” or “straighten up your liver”, good old sayings which mean take courage. Jesus said Take courage, because I have conquered the world. I have conquered the world.

Isn’t it great that we have on our side someone who has conquered the world. Think about that for a second. Jesus Christ has conquered the world and all the crud that happens in the world. What else could we want? Since you are scholars in John you know that when John uses this word world it stands for all those things which are contrary to God. We could substitute world for all of the cultural, physical, and emotional maladies that face us today. We could hear Take courage, for I have conquered death! Take courage for I have conquered divorce, take courage for I have conquered depression, take courage for I have conquered loneliness, take courage for I have conquered the world.

This Scripture and the Scripture in Isaiah speak to us specifically today. We are to take courage not only because Christ has conquered the world but also because he has commanded us to conquer the world through him. Did you notice in Isaiah 41 what was happening. It states that the artisan encourages the goldsmith, the one who smooths with the hammer encourages the one who strikes the anvil. The people who have opposite interests, the ones who work at times in opposite directions, yet in Isaiah are able to come together and fasten it with nails so that it cannot be moved.

That is our job today here at First Presbyterian. We come from different walks of life, we all have different interests, yet we are called like Isaiah says to nail down, to fasten God’s kingdom here on this earth. Let us together have courage because united in Him, the One who has conquered the world nothing can overcome us. Take courage. Amen.