

July 30, 2023

Romans 8:28-39

“More Than Conquerors!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today, July 30th, the Lutheran church commemorates Robert Barnes. Most have never heard of him. Barnes was not a German. He was born in 1495 in Norfolk, England. In 1514, he began studying at Cambridge University and also became an Augustinian monk (the same order that Martin Luther joined in Erfurt, Germany). Eventually, Barnes was introduced to the writings of Luther and began urging reformation in England. He was tried for heresy and put under house arrest in London for almost two years. In November 1528, he was warned that the authorities were planning his execution, so he fled to the continent and finally reached Wittenberg in 1530.

He stayed in Wittenberg for over a year, living in the home of Johannes Bugenhagen, Luther's pastor, and studied under Luther. In 1531, Barnes published his most important work: *A Supplication to King Henry VIII*. It was his attempt to convert his king to Lutheranism. Barnes wrote: "Scripture says that faith alone justifies because it is that through which alone I cling to Christ. By faith alone I am partaker of the merits and mercy purchased by Christ's blood. It is faith alone that receives the promises made in Christ. Through our faith the merits, goodness, grace, and favor of Christ are imputed and reckoned to us."

Through his writing, Barnes came to the notice of Thomas Cromwell (the new, Protestant English Chancellor). By this time, Henry VIII wanted a divorce from his first wife, and when the pope denied him, he turned to the Lutherans. Barnes was appointed to carry Luther's reply to Henry VIII on the divorce issue, and so he returned to England under safe conduct from the king. The letter from Luther was not what the king wanted to hear. This was the beginning of a precarious relationship between Robert Barnes and King Henry VIII.

It frequently starts out that way doesn't it? All of the sudden, we Christians, who say things that others don't want to hear, find themselves in a precarious relationship. Do you know what "precarious" means? It means great danger and a relationship that is on the verge of collapse. Why is that? Why do people find Biblical Christianity to be such a problem? It's for the same reason that people hated Jesus. He says in John 7:7 that the world "hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil." This unbelieving world does not want us to say that immorality is immoral. Forget the fact that all we want to do is share with those who do not know Christ the forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven. The problem is that one can only receive forgiveness if one realizes that they are sinful.

Before the Samaritan woman at the well could receive the living waters that are found in Jesus, she had to come to grip with the fact that living together with a man, and having sexual relations with him outside of marriage was wrong. In order for Simon Peter to know the gift of Jesus, he had to confess "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Before the sinful woman could receive the reassurance that all was well with her and the Lord she first placed herself behind Jesus, wept at his feet, dried his feet with her hair, kissed his feet, and anointed his feet with ointment. And let's face it, this unbelieving world does not like any of this. As it is written in John 3:19, "light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

So, yes, we live in a precarious relationship with a lot of people if we really want to practice Biblical Christianity. But we are **More Than Conquerors**. I've always said that if we at Pilgrim could just get rid of a few commandments and stop being so slavish to the Word of God, we could fill the pews. But that is exactly the problem with progressive Christianity. And as soon as you do that, you don't grow a house of repentance and faith in Jesus. What you grow is a community of people who have reinvented Jesus. Let's face it. We are in hard days that are like the days that Paul described in his exhortation to Pastor Timothy: "... the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering ..."

And that is something we really don't want to hear. Endure suffering! And what were those words he said before that? "... be sober-minded." In other words, "wake up, be clear headed, don't allow your passions to get in the way of what is true and right. Be faithful!" And we should be comfortable with that, for the apostle Paul reminds us in our epistle lesson for this morning that we are **More Than Conquerors!** And we should also reread these words of Paul: "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" All things are working for our salvation. Now, the truth is that we do not always find quick comfort in knowing that, when everything is said and done, we win in the end. It's the middle part that's upsetting. But we do find comfort in knowing that we have the truth and that God is saving others through us.

Paul reminds us that God did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all and he will graciously give us all things! And that is what we want for this unbelieving world! Our conquering then is twofold. We first conquer when by our message people repent of their sins and join us on our journey to be with the Lord in heaven forever. We then conquer when people have rejected us and the message of the cross, for we know that as they persecuted and crucified our Lord and Savior, he, nevertheless, rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of the Father ruling the universe. And we shall rule with him if we do not lose our hope and give up. Listen again to these powerhouse words of Paul:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Those are wonderful words of comfort because they rest in the knowledge of Jesus Christ who loved us with an everlasting love. This love of Christ takes us to his cross and empty tomb as well as our own dying and rising in him. In the perfect obedience of Christ, and in his sufferings and death for us on the cross, we have the forgiveness of all our sins, no matter how great or small those sins may be. And in that forgiveness, we want to be rid of all desires that would take us back to sin. And because of the greatness of the mercy of our Savior, and the gift he brings, we want the whole unbelieving world to know and have

what we have in Jesus. But in order for them to have it, we cannot shrink from the message of repentance and faith. If we are to snatch people from the fires, they must first see the fires they are in.

During Lent 1540, Robert Barnes preached a reformation sermon in London and was imprisoned in the London Tower. When Cromwell himself fell out of favor with the king and was arrested in June, Barnes lost his protector. On July 30th, Barnes was burned to death. To the very end, Barnes remained steadfast in his faith, and was able to give a thoroughly Lutheran final confession. He spoke about the death and passion of Christ as being the only way of salvation. In part, he said: "... I trust in no good work that ever I did, but only in the death of Jesus Christ."

When the news of Robert Barnes's martyrdom reached Germany, Philip Melanchthon was utterly horrified and Luther criticized Henry VIII. Barnes had confessed the doctrine of justification by faith alone and so was martyred by a king who was an enemy to that most precious doctrine of the Gospel. Luther wrote:

This Dr. Robert Barnes we certainly knew, and it is a particular joy for me to hear that our good, pious dinner guest and houseguest has been so graciously called by God to pour out his blood and to become a holy martyr for the sake of His dear Son ... He always had these words in his mouth: Rex meus, regem meum ["my king, my king"], as his confession indeed indicates that even until his death he was loyal toward his king with all love and faithfulness, which was repaid by Henry with evil. Hope betrayed him. For he always hoped his king would become good in the end. Let us praise and thank God! This is a blessed time for the elect saints of Christ and an unfortunate, grievous time for the devil, for blasphemers, and enemies, and it is going to get even worse. Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott