

**Ezekiel 37:15-28**  
**Saints Triumphant Sunday**  
**Lord, Keep Us...**  
**Watchful for Our Triumph**

**Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church**  
**Winchester, VA**  
**Pastor Paul Krueger**  
**November 19, 2017**

<sup>15</sup> The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>16</sup> “Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, ‘Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.’ Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, ‘Belonging to Joseph (that is, to Ephraim) and all the Israelites associated with him.’ <sup>17</sup> Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand.

<sup>18</sup> “When your people ask you, ‘Won’t you tell us what you mean by this?’ <sup>19</sup> say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph—which is in Ephraim’s hand—and of the Israelite tribes associated with him, and join it to Judah’s stick. I will make them into a single stick of wood, and they will become one in my hand.’ <sup>20</sup> Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on <sup>21</sup> and say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. <sup>22</sup> I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. <sup>23</sup> They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

<sup>24</sup> “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. <sup>25</sup> They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. <sup>26</sup> I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. <sup>27</sup> My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. <sup>28</sup> Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.”

Last Saturday, our nation celebrated a holiday called Veterans Day. It’s a day which we have set aside to honor the men and women in our country who have taken upon themselves to protect our nation and its principles and freedoms, to protect our very lives, by offering their lives in the service of our armed forces. Veterans Day in our country is celebrated on November 11 each year—the eleventh day of the eleventh month—because that’s the day upon which in 1918 a cease fire that had been signed earlier that morning went into effect, bringing a conclusion to World War I “The War to End all Wars.”

It didn’t really live up to its name though, did it? Less than thirty years later on May 8, 1945 the Western World was celebrating once again. The cause this time? V-Day, Victory in Europe, the Allies had formally accepted the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany. World War II had come to an end, in Europe at least. But was V-Day the day that won the war in Europe? Many people would point to D-Day, June 6, 1944 when the Allied troops made their landing on the coast of Normandy and won the victory that forced the Nazis to split their forces in two, as the day that the war was really won. It was over, even if the enemy didn’t know it yet.

Why the history lesson? I think that year between D-Day and V-Day can serve as a bit of a reference point for where you and I are right now. D-Day in the war between God and evil took place

when Jesus first came into the world. Through His perfect life, His sacrificial death, and His glorious resurrection, the enemy was decisively defeated. V-Day for Christ and His Church will come at His second coming, when the enemy will be forced to totally and finally surrender. And here you and I are, somewhere in the middle. We know that the victory is ours. We know that our Lord Commander, the Bridegroom as Matthew referred to Him in his Gospel, has said He will return soon. But in the meantime, as the battles continue raging on around us and waging on within us it can sometimes feel like that victory isn't quite so sure. We can get so caught up in the evil that we see around us that we forget about the triumph that our Savior has already won, and we stop watching for the even greater triumph that He's promised us at His return.

So our prayer today as we consider where we are in these last days between our Savior's first and second comings is *Lord, Keep us Watchful for our Triumph*. Even as we grow tired and weary from waiting, worn down from the struggle against the evils of the world on the outside and the evil of our own sinful flesh from within, dear Lord, keep us watchful and waiting, ever mindful of the salvation you have won for us which we already enjoy and which we will enjoy in its fulness a fulness we cannot even imagine, when You come again in glory.

In our text from the prophecy of Ezekiel we're presented with the Word of the Lord that was spoken through Ezekiel some 600 years before Jesus was born. The Northern tribes of Israel, which had come to be known as by the largest of those 10 tribes, Ephraim, had been carried into captivity by the Assyrians. The Southern nation of Judah to whom Ezekiel belonged was currently in captivity in Babylonia.

That's when God chose to deliver this message of hope through His servant Ezekiel. Ezekiel's ministry is memorable because of the object lessons God had him use as he spoke to the Israelite people and this time wasn't any different. Ezekiel was to take two sticks, write Ephraim on the one and Judah on the other. Then He was to join them together in one hand so that the two became one. And when the people, wondering how this reunion could ever possibly happen would ask Ezekiel, **won't you tell us what you mean by this?** God told Ezekiel to respond with these words:

**This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph and join it to Judah's stick. I will make them into a single stick of wood, and they will become one in my hand.' ... This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. <sup>22</sup> I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. <sup>23</sup> They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God. <sup>24</sup> "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees.**

One stick, one nation, one kingdom, one king, one shepherd. That was God's promise for those captive souls in Babylon. Even as they felt that all was lost and all hope was gone God promised to gather them to Himself, one people and one God. Sound familiar? Those last words of that section, **they will be my people, and I will be their God?** We've seen those words a couple of times already this year. Once you know they're there you start to see them more and more, maybe not word for word like we have here in Ezekiel 37 but that's that one, changeless, perfect thought of God which weaves its way through all of Scripture and which drives the very fabric of the history of our world. That is the unity that our God who is in control of everything, our Lord who has already won the victory is moving us toward.

That is God's promise for you; even when everything seems to be going wrong and it might otherwise look like all hope is lost you have the promise that your almighty and victorious God will deliver you from this world of evil and from your own sinful backsliding, He will cleanse you and gather you into His hand. Two and a half millennia removed from the first audience to hear these words we know exactly how that cleansing came about. It was Jesus who with that decisive victory on the cross washed away our sins and clothed us in His righteousness making us heirs of His everlasting kingdom.

Everlasting, that's the note that God draws out as Ezekiel's message continued: **They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever.** <sup>26</sup> **I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever.** <sup>27</sup> **My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.** <sup>28</sup> **Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.**

Forever. Forever with the LORD. Forever one. **I will be their God, He says, and they will be My people and My dwelling place will be with them forever.** Are we there? It's a little bit of "yes" and "not quite yet" isn't it? And that's because we're living in this time of tension between the "already" and the "still to come." **The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14).** He has given us **new birth into... an everlasting inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade (1 Pt 1:3-4)** and has declared us to be **His chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God (1 Pt 2:9).**

That "forever" started for us when God brought us into His family through the miracle of His grace which He pours out through Word and Sacrament. The battle is over. That D-Day victory is won. You are, right now, God's holy people, His triumphant saints. He promises us that although battles still rage on around us the triumph is ours and He points us forward to the even greater joy that still awaits us. **Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.** <sup>2</sup> **My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?** <sup>3</sup> **And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (Jn 14:13).**

It's the waiting that's the hard part, isn't it? We hear the words of caution Jesus spoke at the end of His parable in our Gospel lesson, **Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour (Mt 25:13);** but as we keep watch, what we see can be disheartening. We're tempted to grow pessimistic and despondent. We may find ourselves staring up into the heavens wondering, "When, oh when, is He going to come back I don't think this world will hold out much longer." That's where the disciples were on Ascension Day when the angels found them, **"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven"** (Ac 1:11).

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Take heart, for I have overcome the world. I will come back to take you to be with me. I will be your God and you will be My people and My dwelling place will be with you forever.

As you read the headlines and the newsfeeds, or listen to the nightly news reports, remember that your God, the God of History is in control. While it looks as though the world around us grows worse

and worse with every passing day remember that your God has already won the victory over evil and with each passing day He moves us closer to history's singular goal.

As we remain watchful for that Day of Triumph, our lives—despite all that goes on around us in this world—our lives as Saints Triumphant can be lives of optimism and hope. So keep your lamps trimmed and burning, mindful of the victory that is already ours and watchful for the triumph yet to come.

Amen.