

Sermon on **Revelation 20:1-6** – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

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**He seized the dragon...and bound him.**

Are you used to losing? You can learn things from losing – how to be gracious in defeat, identify things to work on for sure. But when it feels like you are always losing, you can lose hope. Hannah taught in Seminole, Florida, not far from Tampa, in the early 2000s. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers finally showed promise and later won the Superbowl. Ticket prices soared. With a smile on their face members who were season ticket holders told stories of how it wasn't always that way. Years before, the Buccaneers lost so much, they couldn't get anyone to go to games with them even for free. As they went into games, they put two unused tickets underneath their windshield wipers for free for anyone. When they came back to their vehicle after another loss, they found six more unused tickets. Would they ever win?

God's people felt like the Buccaneers' fans season expecting to lose. Jesus, the Son of God, had come in the flesh, suffered and died for the sins of the world. But he rose. He ascended. He sent apostles to share the good news of sins forgiven and heaven opened. The Gospel spread. Hearts and eternities were changed by the good news that Jesus Christ came to save sinners. But persecution picked up, and believers were even put to death. John was exiled. It felt like all they could do was lose. Jesus pulls the curtain back for John to show what was really going on and no matter how they felt or it seemed, they had victory in Christ.

**He seized the dragon...and bound him.**

**1) Jesus is in control and sets a limit to evil.**

**2) Jesus gives victory to all who believe in him.**

*“And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be set free for a short time. I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”* (Revelation 20:1-6 NIV).

**Jesus is in control and sets a limit to evil.** It is important to let Scripture interpret Scripture. Here we have apocalyptic language which uses figures of speech and symbolism. The “*chain*” and the number “*1000*” are good pictures which show something and aren't literal. John sees an “*Angel*” coming out of heaven holding the key to the Abyss or hell. Earlier in Revelation, chapter 1, Jesus is the one shown to hold the key. “*Angel*” means “messenger,” and so this is Jesus the victorious Godman, not a created angel. He comes with a message, one we desperately need to hear.

They felt like losers who would soon be stamped out, but John sees Jesus seize the dragon, the devil, and bind him like a dog on a chain in hell. What is pictured here Jesus actually did, not with a literal chain, but by taking on flesh, defeating every temptation, casting out demons, healing the blind, sick, and lame, suffering for the sins of the world on the cross and dying for the world. Though Satan may have thought he won Good Friday, on Easter Jesus came back to life and descended into hell to proclaim his victory. Satan, “*the strong man*” of the Gospel lesson (Mark 3) had been tied up, *chained*. And the Gospel went out.

“*He bound him for a thousand years.*” 10 is the number of completeness in Revelation, and this large symbolic number stands for a complete time set by God for the devil to be restrained and the Gospel to go out. From the time Jesus lived to even now – we are living in this period (Matthew 24). The devil will rage and roar like a lion looking for someone to devour, like a rabid dog waiting for someone to come within its chain length and intimidate believers to feel like losers, but the Gospel is changing hearts and lives. Jesus has been plundering hearts and souls to himself. Nations, even here, once lost in pagan unbelief or deceived by false doctrines have seen the good news of Jesus Christ come across the globe to them and turn hearts, even yours and mine, from the darkness and hopelessness of unbelief to the light of Christ.

But has the feeling of losing warped our thinking? Have we gotten used to losing? A child turns away from the faith they once professed. A friend or co-worker has no time for your invites to church or to “*come and see.*” You take heat for guarding your tongue, honoring the commandments, and living honestly as a Christian. We struggle with our own doubts and temptations, and the guilt of falling into sin yet again, having wandered shamefully within the devil’s reach. It seems that at every turn someone is waiting to put you down for believing in Jesus and living for him. And the devil whispers, “You are a loser, and all you can do is lose.” New Christians, much like the Buccaneers early teams in the NFL, were overwhelmed by all the losses. But look and listen to the message Jesus delivered for you. You aren’t defeated. You are winning because of Jesus. Jesus has forgiven your sins by his suffering and death on the cross. Yes the world hates you, but look at that cross - God loves you and guards you. Jesus loved to use the picture of himself as the Good Shepherd – a picture to teach you that you are his beloved sheep for whom he laid down his own life and took it up again. He searches for you and finds you. And he has a place in heaven for you. You aren’t a loser. Christ has given you victory in him. **He seized the dragon...and bound him. Jesus is in control and sets a limit to evil.**

**Jesus gives victory to all who believe in him.** *I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.* At the same time as we have trials and struggles here, Jesus shows us where those who have died in the Lord and for the sake of the Gospel really are. While all we see are graves and funerals, Jesus shows us that believers rule with him. They live now and will eternally. Their souls are in heaven with Jesus while their bodies await resurrection on judgment day.

And we, even now, are ruling with Christ and his priests as believers. In chapter 1, we hear this him of praise, “*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen*” (Revelation 1:5-6). Once dead in sin and unbelief, we have been made spiritually alive when the Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts through the Gospel message about Jesus and the Sacrament of Baptism. Hell and death have lost their sting. They don’t own us. We have won. The rest of the world may not treat us like that or even recognize it. And we don’t always feel it with our emotions. They surely didn’t in John’s day, but Jesus gives John this vision to show him and us that we have life in this world right now. We have the peace of knowing our sins are forgiven in Jesus. We have the courage to face each day and fight the constant battles against sin and temptation. We put God first in our lives because Jesus goes with us and we have his assurance that nothing can separate us from his love, “*Surely I am with you always even to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20). Paul told the Romans 8:38-39 – “*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” John the Baptist told his followers, “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them*” (John 3:36).

With Jesus Christ and only through him, we have peace, forgiveness and life now and eternally. Without him, we have only the fearful expectation of fear, death and hell. We are “*blessed and holy*” because we share in this first resurrection and have eternal life now in our possession, but experienced fully in heaven. Hell can’t touch us. Now, we live by faith holding to the promises and the pictures Jesus brings. In heaven we’ll get to see him face to face. You aren’t a loser. In Christ you have the victory, even greater than a Buccaneer’s superbowl. **Jesus gives victory to all who believe in him.** Amen.