

Theme: Victory!

Text: Romans 8:18 (NKJV)

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

*In the name of Jesus, who gives us the victory in life and in death,
dear family, loved ones, and friends of Wayne Bliss,*

- ✝ If you knew Wayne, even for a little while, you probably knew that Wayne was a sports fan. The first time that I met Wayne he and Tari stopped by while I was moving in to the parsonage and Wayne was decked out in San Francisco Giants gear and I was wearing a Golden State Warriors shirt. That of course struck up a conversation about sports and our favorite sports teams. I knew right away that Wayne and I were going to get along just fine!
- ✝ Wayne and Tari usually got to church early most Sundays, so Wayne and I would talk sports for a bit—usually about the Warriors—before Bible Class began.
- ✝ Wayne loved his Bay Area sports teams. (It's very fitting that the photo Tari sent me of Wayne for the bulletin today is of Wayne in a 49ers shirt!). I thought about the great teams that Wayne got to see play in this area over the past few decades: There was the 49ers dynasty in the 80's and 90's; the Giants three World Series titles in the 2010s; and, most recently, the Warriors four NBA titles since 2015. Wayne got to see a lot of championship teams and was able to cheer his teams on to **victory** many times.
- ✝ As great as those teams were none of them were victorious every time. None of them were undefeated. Wayne saw his share of losses and losing seasons with all of his sports teams.
- ✝ Thankfully, and most importantly, Wayne was also an enthusiastic part of a "team" that has never lost. A "team" that is undefeated and undefeatable. Because of this we can truly say that we are gathered here today to celebrate a **Victory!**
- ✝ As the words of our responsive reading declared earlier, **"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).**
- ✝ **Victory?** Today? Really? Truly? Yes! That is the truth. That is not an "oversell," or a euphemism. It's not some trite Christian term that we use to deny the reality of the pain, sadness, and loss we are feeling at Wayne's passing. Because the reality is he will be missed deeply by so many. There is no denying that.
- ✝ So yes, there is sadness, there is pain, and there is loss. But today truly is a **victory** service, in every sense of the word.
- ✝ There is **victory** because of Jesus! For Wayne, and for us!
- ✝ Look again at the words of our sermon text, **"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).**

- ✝ Despite the losses in this life, despite the pain, the illness, and the suffering that Wayne had to endure, especially at the end of his life, there truly is **victory!** Why? Because as the Apostle Paul puts it “**our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory**” (Romans 8:18 EHV) that Wayne is now experiencing in heaven!
- ✝ Because of Jesus and what He did for Wayne, He is now experiencing the true meaning of his last name: Bliss! Not just for a moment, or for a lifetime, but forever!
- ✝ Thanks be to God that Wayne knew this! Tari shared with me some of the Bible passages Wayne had saved from a daily Scripture calendar. The passages Wayne saved reflected his confidence in the eternal **victory** that was his in Christ:
 - **2 Samuel 22:2 – “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer.”**
 - **Psalms 48:14 – “For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death.”**
 - And Jesus’ own words from **John 16:33 - “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”**
- ✝ These words and promises of God were what moved Wayne to trust in Jesus in death, and these words and promises of God were what moved Wayne to live the way he did in his life: To the glory of Jesus, who had given him the **victory!**
- ✝ In a congregation full of friendly people, Wayne was one of the friendliest. He had a genuine heart for people and was constantly thinking of others and asking how they were doing.
- ✝ Wayne served as an elder in our congregation and held various offices on our church council during his time with us at St. Stephen, including as chairman of our Mission Committee.
- ✝ A few years back, he struck up a friendship with one of the young students (Oliver) at our Christian Day school and was a real encouragement to him in his faith. He encouraged this student to get baptized, and when the family had a private baptism ceremony here at church, Wayne and Tari were there to witness the blessed event and even gave a present to the young man, which really moved him and his family deeply.
- ✝ After every Sunday service I close with a blessing, “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all,” and without fail, when I would walk down the aisle to exit the church Wayne was always thoughtful enough to say to me as I walked by him, “And also with you, pastor.”
- ✝ I’m sure all who knew Wayne have many treasured memories of him and the kind of caring man that he was.
- ✝ There is **victory** in that. There is victory the blessing of a life well-lived to the glory of God. There is victory in the blessing of the time we were able to spend with Wayne. There is victory in the memories that we will always be able to cherish.
- ✝ But those victories are in no way the greatest **victory** we celebrate today. These things we’ve mentioned about Wayne are not the reason we call this a **victory** service, even in death.
- ✝ No, this **victory** is because of Christ! Let’s read a little further on in **Romans chapter 8**, the chapter from which our sermon text is taken, and we will find these comforting words of eternal **victory**:

- ✝ “What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35, 37-39 EHV)
- ✝ “**More than conquerors through Him who loved us.**” The word used there in the Greek includes the Greek word for “**victory**,” and it literally means “super conqueror;” *to be completely victorious, to completely win out over something*. Notice what that verses does not say. It does not say, “You are more than a conqueror because of yourself.” It does not say, “You are more than a conqueror because of your health, or your situation in life,” or “You are more than a conqueror—except if you have cancer, or if you are nearing the end of your life.” No, our status as “**more than conquerors**” has nothing to do with our circumstances and everything to do with Christ! What He has done for Wayne, and for all of us.
- ✝ “**More than conquerors.**” “Completely victorious.” That description fits Wayne perfectly! Not because Wayne was perfect (he confessed his sins in the worship service each Sunday just like the rest of us). No, Wayne was not perfect, but Jesus was—and is! Even in sickness and death Wayne was “*completely victorious*,” he is “**more than a conqueror**” because of Christ.
- ✝ Wayne knew and believed the words and promises of Jesus, his Savior. He knew and believed that because Jesus rose from the dead victoriously, he too would rise to eternal life in heaven with Him. As Jesus Himself put it in one of our Scripture readings for today, “**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?**” (John 11:25-26). By God’s grace Wayne did believe this and as a result he is “**more than a conqueror**” and is experiencing the eternal bliss of victory in heaven with Jesus!
- ✝ **Victory!** “**More than conquerors through him [Christ] who loved us.**” What a comfort! You see, Jesus didn’t just love Wayne; He loves us! He lived for us! He was holy for you and me, because we could not be! He died that we might live! He lives that we would never die! Wayne knew this and that is why he clung so tightly to Jesus.
- ✝ Without Jesus there is no Wayne. Without Jesus there is no true joy today, no true victory!
- ✝ But thanks be to God who has given Wayne, and us, the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! (1 Corinthians 15:57). Amen.