

Day One

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here in John 16:33, Jesus tells us to take heart because He has overcome the world. And that's great news, but the realities that we sometimes face would call that victory into question. The devil is always at work to cast doubt on God's Word and promise.

I watched the movie "Silence" a couple night ago. It's a movie about a time of persecution of the Church in Japan in the 1600's (I think – I'm not sure). The main character was a Jesuit priest. As he observed the persecution carried out against Christians – as he himself suffered those persecutions – he struggles with the truth of God's Word.

He struggled with God's perceived silence because God was not overcoming the world. He was not removing the suffering. He wasn't protecting His children. Or so it seemed.

We live in a broken world where bad things – sometimes terrible things – happen. We pray and pray and nothing seems to change. Sometimes it gets worse. Sin and the devil are at work in those realities to convince us that God's Word isn't true – that He can't be trusted.

The cross tells us that Jesus has walked that road of suffering before us and for us. The empty tomb tells us that He has indeed overcome this world. He has overcome all the powers at work to destroy God's creation by His sacrificial death and victorious resurrection.

In the midst of trials, we focus on the cross and the empty tomb. We cling to God's Word and promise made complete in Jesus life, death and resurrection. We trust in His faithfulness and His love for us. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Everyone who believes in Him will live even if they die. That is His Word of promise to us. And it is certain and it is true.

Day Two

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Here in Ephesians 3:17-18, Paul talks about being rooted and grounded in love – in the love of Christ – so that we can comprehend the depth of His love for us. That brings to mind planting and gardening. Plants that are well rooted in good soil prosper. They grow and mature. They bear fruit.

We are planted in Christ in Baptism. We are joined together with Him in His death and life. We are connected to Him – rooted in Him. He is the soil that feeds and nurtures us. He is the one who causes the growth – who causes us to mature and bear His fruit.

We also participate in that process by reading and hearing God's Word. That is the means that God uses to feed us and nurture us – the means that He uses to keep us well rooted and connected to Him. Jesus Himself says that the one who abides in Him will live.

And so we do.

Day Three

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Philippians 4:8 is a great verse that contains much wisdom. Focusing on the good always pays dividends in the end. It prevents us from getting bogged down in our own negative thoughts or self-pity. It can open our eyes to the blessings that are all around us and give us reason to be thankful.

And that's important because our old sinful flesh wants to keep our focus on all that is negative. It wants to accuse us and convince us that we aren't loved. It wants us to focus on what is wrong with everyone else so that walls get built and we become isolated from God and others.

Ultimately, when we focus on what is good and honorable and just and pure, our gaze should become fixed on Jesus who is the greatest good. He is the way and the truth and the life. All good things come from Him. He has declared His love for us through His life, death and resurrection.

And that is the good that transforms our sinful nature into dearly loved children of God.

Day Four

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The title of today's devotion (based on 1 John 3:23) is "Centered in Love." The writer talks about how our lives as Christians are centered in love. We are brought to life in order to love as we have been loved. We have become Jesus' hands and feet as He works through us to love our neighbors.

We are indeed centered in love. By God's Word at work through the waters of Baptism, we have been united with Jesus in His death and life. We have been made members of His body. We have been brought into His heart.

Centered in that love – centered in the heart of God – we are now vehicles through which the love of God continues to reach out to others in this broken world. That is why we still remain in this world. We are here for the benefit of our neighbors. Through the Word of God we share – through the sharing of the hope that is ours in Jesus Christ – we encourage brothers and sisters in the faith or we introduce others to Jesus and the salvation that is His gift to all who believe.

Day Five

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Matthew 7:17 talks about good fruit and bad fruit. More often than not, people talk about good works and bad works in relation to this verse. But this is really talking not about our works but about our nature. The healthy tree bears good fruit. The diseased tree bears bad fruit.

And there is nothing that the tree can do to change its nature. If the nature of the tree is diseased, the tree will not bear good fruit. It may look like good fruit. But it's not. So it is with our works. The works may look good, but if they are produced by one who is cut off from God – who doesn't believe – then they are not good fruit. Putting on a good show doesn't change the inner being.

The nature of the tree needs to be changed. It needs to be changed from the outside. That's what God has done for us. He has come to us through His Word to make us new – to fix our brokenness. He has cleansed us of Adam's sin and made us His children.

And as children of God, we now produce good fruit. We become displays for God's glory – displays for God's re-creative work. We become living testimonies of the new life that is God's gift to all who believe.