**John 16:23-33 (ESV)**

“In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. **24** Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. **25** “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. **26** In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; **27**  for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. **28**  I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” **29** His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! **30** Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” **31** Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? **32** Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. **33** I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

**“Christ Our Confidence”**

 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. In an age of calculations and computers, life has become merely a measurement. It is a game of probability or playing the odds. When a doctor diagnosis a patient, they will never say it will be 100% guarantee for a successful cure. When a person goes to a casino or buys a lottery ticket, the odds are not in your favor, so there is nothing to complain about when losing. When considering our existence a human being, the likelihood of my conception was far from a matter of me choosing or even the will of my parents. Who would have also guessed the fields still to be empty this year compared to last year? If life is purely a numbers game, eventually we find out luck runs out no matter how hard we try.

 Thank God, Christ did not come into the world having to place a bet. There was no probability only sin, death, and the power of the Devil. The Father was not gambling with the sacrifice of His Son. He was securing salvation for a sinful world. Of course, Christianity is not like other religions. It never had a chance, because it had nothing to do with numbers. Jesus rising from the dead claimed victory by the cross, this fact alone is what gives life to His Church. As we heard today from Acts about Lydia, “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” Numbers are never good enough, not by God’s standard. Only the certainty in Jesus lets us pray in the Name of Him who has overcome the world.

 Christ opened the way to pray confidently in His Name. The disciples were familiar with the concept of prayer. They were faithful Jews and understood its place in the Old Testament. It was a calling out to God like Abraham did for a firstborn son, like Moses did over the people of Israel, and like what happened at worship in the temple. The book of Psalms are prayers crafted by the saints of old saying, “Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.” (Psalms 55:17). Outside of following the Old Testament and teaching His disciples the Lord’s Prayer, the last night in the upper room is when prayer changed. Jesus stated, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” They had always turned to Jesus during His ministry petitioning him for help. Only now, before the cross, His Name would grant access in praying to the Father.

 Plenty of religions pray. It can be facing the holy city of Mecca for the Muslims. It can be at the “Wailing Wall” for the Jews in Jerusalem. Christians pray not to a place, but to the person Jesus Christ. Since He rose from the dead, His Name directs sinners to nothing else than the Father in Heaven. As the Son declared on the night of betrayal, “I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” His sacrifice made for sinners opened the certainty of being heard by God. It is not a formula to say, “In the Name of Jesus, Amen.” Instead, praying in His Name draws us into the Holy Trinity where our greatest joy is to know and call upon God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus tells us to “ask” because those baptized into Him have received redemption. All spiritual and physical requests can be made for, “the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.”

 Yet, Christ also knows our lack of confidence to pray In His Name. The disciples acted as if they could handle it boasting of their faith in Him. Only to hear in the next verse we heard, “Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone.” Later that night in the Garden of Gethsemane while Jesus prayed in view of His suffering and death. He returned to His sleeping disciples saying to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:40-42). Let alone, when the time came for what would be His greatest gift of love for sinners. The disciples did exactly as Jesus said. They showed their lack of faith in Him by running away from the cross. None could predict this place of death as a promise for life. None could see any future for them in Jesus’ Name.

 Christ knows our lack of confidence as well. Surely, we are just as uncertain as the disciples if predicting the future rests on our works without remembering Christ’s Word. These are distressing times not only because of financial indebtedness, immorality tearing apart families, or question over the next threat by terrorism. President Harrison in a recent interview gave this additional fact, “There is a concerted definite effort to shut the door for the Gospel in the public square in this country…I am talking about specific legislative attacks, court decisions, which restrict our access and our ability to function…” (Issuesetc.org 4/23/13). The future does not look good. Our initial reaction is strength in works. Yet, it neglects to hear what Jesus said when nothing looked good before His cross. “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace.” Prayer is not even safe, because whatever dwells in us lacks confidence. This is why the certainty rests with Jesus at work to give faith in His Word and Sacrament.

 Only Christ gives peace with confidence to pray In His Name. The disciples did not realize it, but they already had what Jesus’ promised. He said, “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” The Greek word for “take heart” is a command that also means “Cheer up” or “Take Courage.” Of course, this is in what Jesus said and not some self-glory. St. John the Apostles would later proclaim, “For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world— our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5). This is no small matter because Jesus is greater than sin, death, the devil, the Law and even me. Only He can take care of every spiritual and physical need. He does this by standing in our place on the cross so all can call upon Him. Forgiveness, life, and salvation dwell in no one else.

 The peace Jesus gives to pray in His Name does not leave us empty handed, but confident. First, we are better off than the disciples because the Holy Spirit has brought all truth by the New Testament Scripture. Second, we are not as scattered so much as if Jesus does not hear the cries of His precious sheep. Luther makes it clear, “For there are two things that sustain Christendom: God’s Word and the prayers of Christians. Just as the Christian church is sustained through God’s Word and the ministry, so it is also sustained through the prayer of every individual Christian” (House Postils Vol. 6 109). The most powerful arsenal against the odds is not to play the game, but going to God’s standard. He set it in the cross where there was no possibility for a future, but Jesus turned it into 100% victory. His Word gives confidence to the baptized against more than the odds, but sin, death, and the Devil. Certainty we have from Jesus and He lets us even pray in the Name of Him who has overcome the world. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.