

Written Copy: Ephesians 6:10-13 “You Don’t Stand Alone”

Proper 17, 15th Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, September 1st, 2024-Labor Day Weekend

Text: Ephesians 6:10-13

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

The text’s intent

In our life lived out as Christians in the world we will be subject to spiritual warfare. We are not called to fight, for Jesus has already fought the battle against Satan and his demons and has won the victory, which He gives to us by faith. We are called to stand in repentant faith, trusting in all that He has done for us and gives to us in our baptism. We hold fast to the truth that He is true God and true man, our Lord and our Savior who gives to us His right standing that counter our continued disobedience. We stand in the Gospel promise of forgiveness of sins, salvation from the devil’s grasp and eternal judgment and eternal life won for us by His death and resurrection. Faith in this counters all the fiery accusations thrown by the devil when we sin, that they are not a big deal, or so big a deal we cannot be forgiven. The Spirit gives us the sure and certain knowledge we are God’s forgiven precious children and brings to our attention God’s very Word that counters the lies of Satan. We stand in faith in the Spirit, and together as His Church in prayer and in support of one another.

Focus Statement:

Because Jesus knew we could never win the battle against Satan and our own sinful hearts He came, He fought, and He won the war against them through His life, death, and resurrection. And He gives us that victory through faith in baptism. He gives and puts on us His spiritual armor that He made and used to defeat the devil. It consists of the truth in who He is, what He has done, and what we are in Him. His Spirit points to our sin because sin really does matter, and we cannot stop sinning, so that we turn in repentant faith and trust in Him alone to be our victor and Savior. Through His promise of forgiveness, we can ask and share forgiveness with others. His word of promise assures us of His sacrificial and unconditional love for us in His gift of life with Him now and eternal life to come,

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

We can lose sight that our life consists of daily spiritual warfare. We think we can win on our own by not sinning. Then when convicted of sin we believe the devil’s lie that sin doesn’t matter since its all forgiven. Or we buy into his accusation that our sin is so great and so numerous, that we can’t be forgiven.

What the hearer should do as a result:

We should participate in the means of grace often so the Spirit can keep us clothed in the armor of God. We stand together in that armor with our brothers and sisters in Christ praying for one another, encouraging one another, and forgiving one another as Jesus has forgiven us.

Subject Sentence: We don’t fight, but stand in the Spirit with one another

Introduction:

One of my favorite western movies is Clint Eastwood in Pale Rider. The story is about a small group of individuals and families that have bought the rights to mine for gold along a stream outside of town. The town is owned by a mining company that wants to clear these settlers out so that they can have all the gold for themselves. They try to get the settlers to sell, but when they are unwilling the mining company hires a group of tough guys to harass and force them out.

The movie opens with these tough guys riding through the settlers' camp on horseback, tearing their camp apart. Needing replacement supplies, a member of the settlement rides into town to restock. But when he arrives, he is set upon by these tough guys who begin to beat him up by striking him repeatedly with axe handles. They are about to set fire to his supplies and his wagon when, suddenly, you see a hand throw a bucket of water on the tough guy with the match.

The hand belongs to Clint Eastwood, a mysterious figure who has just arrived in town, seeming to be the answer to a little girl's prayer to God for protection. He grabs his own axe handle, and proceeds single handedly to beat up and knock out this group of four tough guys to save the man. While the settlers take Clint Eastwood in and look for him to be their defender and savior, Clint, for his part, tells them they need to stand together and fight for themselves. Yet in the end, who is it that takes on the hired gunman the mining company brings in? It's Clint Eastwood who guns them all down to save the day.

What makes this one of the great action movies and Clint Eastwood's characters one of the great action heroes is his courage, strength, and ability to stand alone and conquer all the bad guys to save the day. It's similar to other movies where an action hero, like Chuck Norris or Stephen Segall is outnumbered yet stands and defeats the bad guys through his martial arts abilities.

Well, that's the movies. But that's not real life. It's not how we are to operate in a physical or spiritual sense. And that is Paul's point in our Epistle Lesson.

Our Christian Life is Spiritual Warfare

For the most part, we see our lives as being pretty safe and peaceful. We might occasionally go someplace where we need to be on the lookout for shady figures. But that's not something we worry about 24-7.

That's not true in a spiritual sense. Our entire lives lived out as Christians in this world consists of spiritual warfare being waged against us. Many times we don't see our lives this way and can lapse into being unprepared. Or we think that, as mature Christians, we are equipped to stand on our own and face any temptation that may come. We can be lulled into seeing ourselves like a Clint Eastwood or Chuck Norris, a spiritual action hero, who can handle whatever comes our way. There are two big reasons this attitude is wrong and dangerous.

The first is who we are as sinners. Jesus in our Gospel Lesson teaches us what sin is and where it comes from. Sin doesn't originate from outside of us. We can be tempted by outside things and influences. But sin originates from within, within our own sinful, selfish, disobedient heart. It wants to do what it wants to do, and it wants to please itself first and foremost. And it is always right, and anyone or anything that tries to oppose it is wrong. Sin is disobedience to God's will and God's way, which is always right and always what is best for us.

God's will and commands always stand counter to what our sinful selfish heart desires. That's why we cannot avoid sinning. You're going to sin no matter how hard you try. If you think you've lived a day without sinning you haven't looked hard enough at yourself, and your thoughts, words and actions. As Jesus says in **Mark 7:20-23** ²⁰ **"What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."** Keeping in mind sin is not just what you say and do, but includes our thoughts, it's easy to see how it is impossible to avoid a day or even an hour without sinning.

The second reason is who we are up against in this spiritual battle. **Ephesians 6:12** **For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.** Paul uses the word "wrestle". This describes a combat that is up close and personal, hand to hand, a personally taxing struggle.

And who do we wrestle against? Not a physical opponent that we can see. Our physical strength does us no good. The enemy is the devil and his demons. They are far superior in strength, cunning, and knowledge about what makes you tick, and what your spiritual weak spots are. They are the enemy that shows no mercy when you are tired, stressed, angry, worried, or in mourning. They want to knock you down and keep kicking you until you are ready to give up.

And how exactly does the devil attack us in spiritual warfare? He tempts us to sin by presenting to us opportunities to disobey, things that hit our weak spots. But he does more than that. Once you have sinned, he whispers in our ear two kinds of lies.

One of these lies is that your sin doesn't really matter. He whispers in your ear. ***"Your lying and gossiping aren't that bad, after all, everyone does those things. It's not as bad as that person who has committed adultery or abused their spouse. Everybody tells a little white lie, everybody gossips. And after all, didn't Jesus say all sins are forgiven? So why are you worrying and fretting over them? Doesn't Jesus want you to be happy?"*** His method here is to get you to stop confessing and repenting of your sin. When we fall into this lifestyle, the end result is, if sin is not a big deal, why do I need a Savior. But without a Savior, you have no forgiveness. Then the devil's got you once again in his grasp.

The other lie moves us in the other direction. He whispers in our ears, ***"What you just did is a very grievous sin. You hurt others by what you said and/or did. You offended God by what you were thinking. And this isn't the first time you've done this. You've done this over and over. Do you really think God's going to keep forgiving you? Can you forgive yourself, when those you've offended don't want to forgive you!"*** His aim here is to bring you into despair over your sin. His goal is that you react in one of two ways. The first is that you believe his lie and see yourself outside of God's love and care, and in despair turn away. The other is that in believing you stand unforgiven and outside of God's love and grace, you say to yourself, ***"I'm lost anyway. Might as well just keep on pleasing myself since I can never please Him."*** Either of these are the devil's avenue to draw you away from your faith in Christ.

Jesus' Answer to Your Spiritual Warfare: Just Stand

To all of this Paul gives a great answer that is yours through faith in Christ Jesus. **Ephesians 6:10-11** ¹⁰ **Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.** ¹¹ **Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.** In the midst of the scary and sobering reality that is spiritual warfare these words are full of great comfort and assurance for each one of you and for me too.

First of all, Jesus doesn't tell you to take on the devil yourself and fight. He simply tells you to stand. That is because Jesus has already taken on the devil one-on-one and has totally defeated him for you, in your place. Jesus in His life on earth took on the devil in His forty-day wilderness temptation and defeated every temptation the devil could throw at Him, even when He was physically at His weakest. And not just those forty days, but every day of His life Jesus resisted the temptation to sin and disobey God. His life was always one of being in right-standing with His Heavenly Father.

But Jesus life and ministry was not just passive obedience. Jesus took it to the devil personally through His ministry of teaching about the Kingdom-the reign and rule of God that had come to supplant and destroy the devil's hold over sinful mankind. No demon could withstand Jesus' order leave when He performed an exorcism. And each time a person believes and trusts in Him the devil suffers loss and defeat in his goal to thwart the will of God.

But the clearest defeat of Satan came at the cross. There Jesus became the atoning sacrifice for your sin and mine. Through His suffering, death, and resurrection He earned for you the victory over sin, eternal death, and the devil that you could never win. And He gives that to you in your baptism.

In your baptism you are given the full armor of God. It's Jesus' armor that He wore in His battle with Satan, so you can know it works. He made it. He wore it. And the Holy Spirit gave it to you and put it on you through His gift of faith. He made the truth of who Jesus really is as God and man, your Lord and Savior, to be your truth, what you hold fast to and base your life on. He gave to you His right standing with the Father, declares it to be yours by faith. Even as you continue to sin, the Father sees you clothed in Jesus' obedience through your repentant faith: the faith that sees your sin, and grieves over it, but then sees Jesus as your loving and forgiving Savior who has washed it all away. That is the Gospel message by which you stand firm, even as you continue to struggle with sin. Sure, the devil will try to accuse you of being the most horrible sinner who should never be forgiven. But your faith in Christ as Savior declares the truth to be otherwise. You are forgiven. And therefore, the devil can take his accusations and go to hell with them. The Spirit teaches you and gives you the sure and certain knowledge that you are saved by grace through faith, now and throughout your life until Jesus calls you home.

We don't fight. We stand in this faith. And when we fall into sin, the Spirit is there to pick us up and set us back on our feet through the repentance He works in our mind and heart. That is the reason we are to confess and repent, so that we would see and know that while we may be knocked down, He is there to lovingly pick us up again. And Jesus' victory is still ours now, and will be ours for eternity.

We Stand Together as His Church

So, we are to stand. Not on our own, but with the ever-present Holy Spirit. And it's not just us and the Spirit, but we stand together as His Church. We stand together as we confess our sins and hear and hold fast to the words of Absolution. We stand together as we hear His Word proclaimed and receive the Sacrament. All these are the ways the Spirit keeps us dressed in the armor of Christ and standing in Jesus' presence.

We stand in worship together. We stand in prayer together as we pray for one another. Pray for your brother and sister in Christ, both on your own, and with them when they are struggling. Share times of presence and fellowship with those who are struggling through the burdens of this life. Forgive them when they sin against you in the same way the Jesus has forgiven you, and so leave no room for the devil to attack either them or you. Share with them this Gospel promise that Christ has won for them the victory over all that troubles them and gives and renews that victory through His gift of faith.

Conclusion

The movies have some awesome action heroes that stand on their own, and even outnumbered, defeat the enemy and save the day. But none can compare to your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He took on the enemies that we mortal sinful human beings had no chance of standing against: sin, death, and the devil. We can't stop our heart from sinning, but Jesus stopped our fate from being eternal death and suffering. The devil may still whisper his lies, but that is what they are. We have and hold God's truth of complete forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life through faith in Christ. He gave us that in our baptism and we put it on and keep it on through the Spirit's work to keep us in repentant faith. Therefore, stand in that faith. Pray for one another and stand with them. Know that even when we fail and sin, our victory remains assured in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.