



July 29-30-31, 2023 -- 9th Sunday after Pentecost

Preacher: Pastor Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: **Fight the Good Fight of Faith**

1. Know Your enemy's objective 2. Follow Your Heavenly Father's directive

1 Timothy 6: 11-16 *11But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you 14to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.*

Dear Christian friends – and fellow soldiers of the cross,

Do you like to fly? I sure do. Maybe it's because our three kids live in three different states, but I enjoy the privilege of quickly getting from one place to another. But, ever since September 11th, I don't think we can ever drive by an airport or walk through TSA security without thinking about how evil men can weaponize passenger planes for evil purposes. All of our presidents keep reminding us that America is still at war. But, it's a different kind of war, isn't it? It's a war on terror. Our brave men and women in uniform are not mobilizing against a particular country. Instead, our military is constantly scanning the skies for unseen terrorists across the world, and yes even in our own country. Thank God for the peace we do have and how we have freedom to travel and raise our families. I don't believe we should go through airports afraid ... just aware, patient with security, with a prayer on our lips asking God to keep us (and those we love) safe. Imagine if we or our military ever become complacent, if we let our guard down even for a few moments – that's when our enemies can and will strike to inflict damage and disaster on our country.

The words of our sermon reading, remind us that every one of us is engaged in battle whether we realize it or not, whether we want to or not. It's not a battle against a particular country. Instead, as the inspired writer Paul pointed out in Ephesians 6:12: ***our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*** Yes, we are daily fighting against the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. The stakes are high – our eternal souls are hanging in the balance. And the day you stop fighting, is the day when you are six feet under or you've lost the battle and maybe even the war.

Remember, Satan will use every weapon in his vast arsenal against Christians. And he makes a special effort to pick off Christian leaders in a congregation. Satan often targets called workers like teachers, staff ministers, and pastors because if he succeeds, he can throw many into chaos. And sometimes he is successful. I know that many of you pray for me and the other called workers and staff here at *St. Paul's*. Thank you – we need your continual prayers, now and in the days to come. And I ask that you continue to pray for us that Satan will not lead us into temptation false teaching, or even despair.

In fact, that's exactly why the inspired writer Paul wrote our sermon reading to young pastor Timothy to not give up and throw in the towel. These words, apply to us, as Christians locked in spiritually battle. So whether you're young or old, a new member to the front line of battle, or maybe a grizzled veteran pew sitter for many years, Paul encourages us to **Fight the Good Fight of Faith**. We do that by first of all knowing our enemy's objective. And we Fight the Good Fight of Faith as we follow our Heavenly Father's directive.

I couldn't begin to guess how many hours and how much money our government has spent investigating terrorists. It just makes good sense that our government wants to know all she can about the enemy to better fight against it. Soldiers of the cross – know your spiritual enemies for the same reason. And God's intelligence, the Holy Bible, tells us what we need to know. Our adversary's name is Satan. And his name tells us something important. His name in the Greek language is translated to English as "enemy". Satan is one of God's special forces turned traitor – a fallen, but powerful angel. Not content with being like God, perfect and holy, he led a revolt with other demons against God Himself. Well, we know from the Scriptures that God defeated him and cast him and his demons, waiting for judgment. No wonder he is the prince of darkness and discontent here on earth. He seeks to stir up treason and treachery everywhere. Satan is the ultimate terrorist, constantly creating friction in a family, in a marriage, and in every church on earth. Understand we face a crafty enemy. Satan is a master of disguise – he can even masquerade as an angel of light. And he has many accomplices – some who know they are working for him and even more who don't in every city including New Ulm.

So how does Satan fight? What is his real objective? Simply put, he seeks to bring souls to hell, our souls to hell. Satan doesn't strike randomly or indiscriminately. His attacks are well thought-out, his snares carefully planned. If Satan's plan had a code name, it would be **Operation Infinite Injury: he seeks to bring eternal harm**. Let me be more specific.

With all due respect to those who say, "war is hell." That's not quite right. War is for a time – hell is for eternity. Time or eternity -- if we confuse the two, we're defending the wrong objective. Satan hasn't confused time with eternity. He cares very little for what happens to us here in this life. And he's willing to trade a little extra here in this life if we give in to him. Satan cares more about eternity. Satan wants us to lay down our Christian priorities – just for a little while, hoping that we won't pick them up again. And he succeeds with far too many. Have you ever seen footage of a cobra about to strike? The cobra sways as it hisses ... for a reason. It's motion mesmerizes and freezes its prey. And then without warning, it strikes to kill. Satan does that. He often lulls us into a false sense of complacency. Then, he strikes us and takes us by

surprise. How do we become complacent? Look at our reading. We become complacent when we focus only on this world and not the next. He charms us with a desire for more – more money, more stuff, more games, a bigger house, a better retirement fund. And he lulls us to sleep telling us that we have all the time in the world to find God, just wait till later. Money is a tool Satan uses to drive a wedge between us and God. Money is not evil. It's a special blessing from our good and gracious God. But, to prize "wealth" at the expense of God and his priorities is not only false, it's downright damning. So what about you, my fellow Christian soldiers? What would a close examination of our service record to God uncover? Stinginess toward God? Quarrels in a family, cowardice in the face of those who taunt us for reading the Bible or faithfully attending worship. Have you ever been AWOL from God: absence without leave – AWOL from God and the study of His Word? Have you ever read your orders from Scripture and conveniently forgotten them? I stand convicted with you. We are not worthy of promotion, but to be separated from God for all eternity. May we truthfully confess "God be merciful to me a sinner."

And this is why we need to hear God's plan again to save us. We could call God's saving plan: **Operation Infinite Mercy** – because God brings every sinner what we don't deserve – heaven for every sinner. Through the distinguished service of His Son Jesus, the God's man Jesus stepped into our shoes, stood at our posts, and performed our duties as a Christian soldier, perfectly. And like the perfect wing man, Jesus Christ shed His blood on the battlefield of the cross for us and was resurrected on the third day. Now, God declares, that Jesus' impeccable record counts for every sinner who believes.

So wary of our adversary, and confident of our victory in Christ alone, we **Fight the Good Fight of Faith**. We now follow our Heavenly Father's directive. What is that directive? It's found in the words of our reading: ***11But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*** Simply put, our Heavenly Father's directive is that we hold on to the eternal life we've been given in baptism. How do we do that? By fighting for, by struggling, by making our every effort to keep our fragile Christian faith strong. We do that, Paul tells us by pursuing righteousness, that is remembering Christ lived for us first, and now the right living we do to thank Christ for what He has done. We pursue Godliness – having His priorities of Christian love and forgiveness, be our priorities. We pursue faith – maintaining a close connection with Christ and His Word even in summer. We pursue love – self sacrificing for others not seeking reward or the praise of others. We pursue endurance – recognizing this Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint (we'll be at our mission as long as God gives us time on earth). We pursue gentleness, showing mercy especially when we have the upper hand. None of these Christian virtues are easy. That's why God says: pursue them. They won't come naturally, and none of us are born with them. They are developed as we connect with God's Word and Sacrament.

Everything in this life is passing. Things age and wear out. People both good and bad die. Only God is eternal. Only He never changes. And He gives eternal life us, his faithful

people on the Last Day. Are these orders for real? His signature, the official seal of heaven is right at the end: ***13In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus ...keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,*** Fellow soldiers for Christ, our orders are authentic to fight the good fight of faith – together. Side by side, day by day, let's not waste our energies to ever fight against each other, but take up our cross, and follow Jesus.

I once read that in the past 4000 years, there have only been @280 years of so called –world peace. Thank God for the peace we've been given right now, even in our war against terror. But remember, those 280 years of world peace don't include the battles waged among families or friends, or even with health problems. Make no mistake. Every day, will be a struggle and it's going to be a battle. But, Satan, that snake who won the battle back in Eden has been crushed by Jesus Christ on Good Friday. His power is limited and controlled. So armed with the full armor of God and the words of our Savior, **Let's Fight the Good Fight of Faith** – knowing that Jesus' victory is our victory. Amen.