

13 March 2011
Lent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Fighting For You”

Text: Genesis 3:1-21; Matthew 4:1-11 (Romans 5:12-19)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

It happened again. A powerful earthquake and tsunami ravaged Japan Friday morning. Our televisions and computers show us the horrible pictures of devastation and destruction. But we've seen it before. The earthquake in Haiti last year and New Zealand last month. The tsunami in Indonesia a few years before that. The flooding in Australia earlier this year, and of New Orleans before that. Disasters are not in short supply these days.

And with this disaster, the questions will come again. Many will see and ask: Why did God cause this to happen? Or, why did God allow this to happen? Why didn't God stop it? And some will presume to offer answers to these questions. There will be those proclaiming that this is God's judgment and punishment against sinners and unbelievers in Japan. Others will think God not powerful enough, or interested enough, to stop it.

But the truth is that we do not have all the answers. We simply do not know why everything happens as it does, and we dare not speak beyond what God has spoken to us in His Word.

But that does not mean we do not have a Word of God to speak when faced with tragedies and disasters like this. *We do*. We certainly do. A word not to satisfy all the “whys” we ask, but a word of comfort. And it is a word that springs forth from the readings that we heard today, for this First Sunday in Lent.

First of all, we heard that all the sin, devastation, destruction, and death that surrounds us in the world today are the aftershocks and ripples of the earthquake and tsunami of sin whose epicenter was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden. The tree of which Adam and Eve were not to eat. And while simply eating a piece of fruit doesn't seem all that bad, and something that would cause all that damage, the Scriptures tell us otherwise. Because of their sin, God now speaks to Adam and Eve of pain and discord, of a world that is cursed and changed, of a life of sweat and hardship. Adam's sin, St. Paul said, has corrupted all human beings, and (he says a bit later) creation also has been so

plunged into sin that *it now groans as in the travail of childbirth* (Rom 8:22). Which certainly seems like what we saw these past few days. Our sin has devastated the world.

But notice what else happens: God is blamed for it all. Adam blames Eve, but is at the same time blaming God for giving him such a woman as to lead him into sin. And Eve blames the serpent, but is at the same time blaming God for giving them such a creation as to lead them into sin. It's all your fault, God. Which is what is behind all the questions about our disasters and tragedies today, too. God *could* have stopped it; He *could* have prevented it; so it's all *His* fault.

Which is to say: because of sin, Adam, Eve, you, me, and all people - we no longer fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Instead we blame Him, accuse Him, vilify Him, and distrust Him. He is not good and loving, otherwise these things would not have happened.

These are exactly the thoughts satan wants us to think. Eve's real temptation wasn't about fruit - it was to be suspicious of God. That He wasn't good, that He wasn't providing for them, that He was holding out on them. That was the basis of satan's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness that we heard of today. It wasn't just about bread and power and glory - it was about trusting God. That God was providing, that God was caring, that God alone is worthy of all worship and praise.

And that is what is behind all the temptations *you* face today, when disasters and difficulties shake and sweep upon your life. That you doubt God's goodness. That you question His love. That you regard Him with suspicion, instead of love and trust. So that you turn away from Him. That you turn to yourself for what you need. That you turn to the wisdom of the world for the truth. Doubt is satan's foot in the door of your heart. *Did God really say? If you are a son of God . . .* And we fall for it. We break the faith.

You see, this is what satan wants and what he has been after from the very beginning. He is not a practical joker who just wants you to do bad things, or who just wants to trip you up and laugh at you. That many - even we - think that way, and so not take him and sin seriously, he doesn't mind! He uses this to his advantage. For all the while, his purpose is much more serious and sinister. For he wants nothing less than to turn us away from God.

And he uses the things of this world to do it. Fruit, bread, disasters, pleasures - what is it with you? What attracts your love more than God? What causes you to doubt His goodness towards you? Who or what do you turn to for joy, comfort, and help instead of Him? Repent. Repent that your heart has turned away and broken the faith. Return to the Lord your God. *Fix your eyes on Jesus* (Gradual).

*Fix your eyes on Jesus, first of all, **in the wilderness**. For what is He doing there? He is there, we are told, because the Spirit put Him there right after He was baptized. But why? You'll commonly hear that He's there teaching us how to battle against satan using the Word of God; how to combat the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God's Word. Well, that's part of it - but it's not the most important part. First and foremost, what Jesus is doing in the wilderness is **fighting for you**. Fighting satan. Fighting his temptations.*

And for Jesus, the temptation used against Adam and Eve is multiplied - for they are tempted in the midst of plenty, in a beautiful Garden; Jesus in the midst of nothing, in the wilderness. But whereas we fall, Jesus does not. He sees through all the temptations, deceptions, and seductions. He fights for us and wins. He keeps the faith perfectly. Or as Martin Luther put it in our opening hymn today: *But for us fights the valiant one, who God Himself elected* (LSB #656 v.2).

But not only there, *fix your eyes on Jesus* also **on the cross**. For there, Jesus is **fighting for you**. Fighting sin, fighting death, fighting satan and hell and all their crew. Fighting the battle we started. Yes, for we brought sin into this world. It was our idea, our choice, our doing, not God's. But rather than destroy the whole mess, He came to fight for us. To join us in our suffering, our grieving, our dying. He takes our sin and makes it His own, to bear the curse and punishment in our place. He puts His own body into the jaws of sin and death, that in His resurrection from the dead He pry open the jaws that have snapped closed on you, and set you free. Free to live a life of faith again. For yes, God is faithful. Yes, God loves you. Yes, He wants you.

And so now, *fix your eyes* - your eyes of faith - *on Jesus **here today***, for here He is **fighting for you** through the preaching of His Word and the giving of His Sacraments. For just as the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was the epicenter of the earthquake and tsunami of sin that now ripples through the world, so the Tree of the Cross, the Tree of Life, is the epicenter of the earthquake and tsunami of the forgiveness and life of Jesus that now floods the world through Word and Sacrament. Fighting satan and all his works and all his ways in every baptism, every absolution, every time the Body and Blood of our Lord is served. For these are the ways the Lord gives the victory of His cross to you. These are the ways He fights for you today. And while these may not look like much, they are more devastating to satan and his kingdom than what we saw on television these past few days.

For these are the ways your Saviour says to you: *I forgive you*. You have broken faith with me, but not I with you. *I forgive you. I love you*. I laid down my life for you, that's how much I do. *I love you*. And I give you my Spirit of love and faith, the

Spirit that worked at creation, that you may be re-created, raised from the death of sin, and live a new life. And take up the battle. Not in your own strength, but in my strength. The strength of my life, my love, my forgiveness. *Do not be afraid.* Yes, the prince of this world is going to throw a lot at you. He's going to make his teeth look mighty big and powerful. He's going to try to scare you and cause you to doubt my love for you. But do not be afraid. *I am with you.* I am with you through it all. Whatever comes. I was in the wilderness, I healed the sick, I raised the dead, I comforted the broken-hearted. *And I still am.* For I am not just the Lord your God, the almighty - I am your Saviour, your brother, your bridegroom. I am one with you and you with me. *I will not leave you or forsake you.* Do not believe satan's lies. His lies are all he has left. But not you! You have life everlasting. You have a kingdom. You have a Father who loves you.

Fix your eyes on Jesus. Not just today, or this Lenten season, but always. No thing and no one else can give you the comfort and strength that you need.

For at all times and in every season, in joy and sorrow and every temptation, He is your Tree of Life (LSB #561), your Mighty Fortress (LSB #656), your Balm and Healing (LSB #421). The pictures we've seen these past few days show us how vulnerable and weak we really are. But the cross of our Saviour shows us how strong and powerful He is. *Fix your eyes on Jesus.* Do not be afraid. Find rest and peace in Him.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.