

30 September 2006
Installation of Rev. James Rice

Redeemer Lutheran Church
Manchester, NJ

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“The War of the Word”

Text: Revelation 12:7-12; Matthew 18:1-11; Joshua 5:13-15

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

How good it is to have someone to fight for you!

When you're in school, or on the playground, and the bully is coming your way.

When at work, and you are being falsely accused.

When everything seems to be going wrong, and there seems to be no hope.

How good it is to have someone step up, step in, and fight for you!

Because we are often weak, and scared, and overwhelmed.

And so today, in the readings, how good to hear of those who fight for us – the angels of God!

Joshua saw the commander of the army of the Lord, who had come to his aid.

Revelation spoke of war in Heaven – Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon and his angels.

And then in Matthew, we heard of the angels of God who are before the Father, ready to go and fight for His little ones – for us! – at a moments notice!

How good to know that we are not alone!

We are not alone against the great wrath of the devil, who has come down to us.

We are not alone against his schemes and traps and temptations; his accusations and threatening roars.

We are not alone, no matter what he hurls against us as Christians, or as a Church.

There are *many* fighting for us.

And that is good.

For he has come against you, hasn't he, O saints of Redeemer Lutheran Church?

The great dragon, the ancient serpent, the devil.

Trying to scatter *this* flock. To cause you fear and confusion; turmoil and despair.

He has come against you as individual Christians *and* as a Church.

Yes, he has not been silent; he has not been still.

But we are here this day to rejoice that the Lord of the battle has sent you one to fight for

you!

A pastor:

Now do not think, “*Oh, we really would rather have the angels!*”

For they too are here. Yes, they have never left.

But our giving God and Father knows exactly what you need, and so today gives you the gift of a pastor. This pastor. Just the right pastor.

A pastor who though weaker in his body than the angels, is at the same time *stronger* – not because of himself, but because of what he has been given to give to you.

Because he fights not in his own strength, but in the strength and with the weapons of the Lord.

Because, you see, war for God is never a matter of physical strength.

Physical strength is not how Joshua overcame Jericho. It is not how Moses overcame Pharaoh. It is not how Gideon overcame the Midianites. It is not how Jesus overcame on the cross.

War for God is always about faith.

Faith in Him and His promises.

And so it is *a war of words*.

We heard that in the reading from Revelation, although it is easy to miss. For what is it that gave our brothers the victory? “***And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.***” (v. 11)

Or in other words: *a war of the words*.

Satan’s wordy weapons are that he is “***the deceiver of the whole world***” (v. 9) and “***the accuser***” (v. 10). He is the father of **lies**. (John 8:44)

But against his wordy deceptions, accusations, and lies stands an even greater and stronger word – the Word of truth, the Word of forgiveness, the Word made flesh.

And it is this Word that casts Satan down and fights for you.

A powerful Word.

Still today.

And so it is this Word that Pastor Rice is armed with, and will speak to you, and with which he will fight for you.

The Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. (Eph 6:17)

And so He will wield the Word:

from this pulpit,

in your classrooms,

at your sick beds and in your hospitals,

in counseling, and in your meetings,

in your living rooms and kitchens,

comforting at funerals,
uniting at weddings,
absolving your sins,
washing you in Holy Baptism,
transforming bread and wine into the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.
He will wield this Word that gives faith, forgiveness, life, and salvation.
This Word as his weapon, his *only* weapon.

And you should insist on it.

To rely on anything else will only weaken him . . . **and you.**

For his ingenuity, his wisdom, his leadership, his strength, his charm, his charisma, and
whatever else he may have going for him – all of that is no match for the evil one!

Who loves it when we rely on those things!

But against the Word of God the devil cannot stand.

As Luther would write: “*One little Word can fell him.*” (LW #298 v. 3)

And that Word not only *can*, but did, fell him!

When, as I said, that Word was made flesh.

A baby in Bethlehem.

The Lamb of God, laid in a manger.

The Lamb of God, hung on a cross.

The Lamb of God, bloody, and then dead. His lifeless corpse taken down and laid in a
cold, dark tomb.

And if it seems to you that your Pastor’s words seem weak in this fight, how about this?

A lamb against a dragon?

A crucified and dead man against all the schemes of a sinful, devilish world?

But do not be deceived!

In such weakness the Son of God is strong.

Yes, strong to save, overcoming sin, Satan, death, hell, and the grave – bringing those
bullies to naught in His resurrection!

Silencing them! And setting us free.

Free *now*, in the forgiveness of our sins.

And free *in the end*, when He sends His angels to come and take us home to Heaven.

Yes, the world thinks this all foolish, and these weapons foolish.

But dear children of God, you know they are not.

You know, by grace through faith.

But I also must tell you – when Pastor Rice is fighting for you with the Word of God,
sometimes it will feel as if he is fighting you!

And you won't like it.

For the bully of sin, and the deceptions and lies of Satan he will attack are not only "out there" – they are in you.

They are in us all.

In our sinful flesh.

The third ally of that unholy trinity: the devil, the world, and our sinful nature.

But as a faithful servant he must speak this Word too.

This Word of Law.

To slay you, in order to bring you life.

To bring you to repentance, so that the powerful, bloody Word of forgiveness and life raise *you* to life again – and for life not only here and now, but for eternity.

So that you rely not on yourselves, but in the Word of God alone.

In the blood of the Lamb.

And trust only in Him.

And with such child-like faith, be great. *Not here*, but great in the kingdom of Heaven.

For your Saviour has done it, and has promised that victory to you.

And that is the confidence and sure hope that now enables you to fight as well.

Not for yourselves, but for others.

For your neighbor in need.

And when your hands and feet and eyes cause you to sin in this fight, *not* to cut them off!

But remember that this is a war of the Word!

And to remember and believe the Word made flesh who His hands and feet and life cut off for you, on the cross.

And that it is His blood – sprinkled on you in Baptism, spoken upon you in absolution, and given to you to eat and drink in His Supper – that now cleanses you from all your sin.

So that you can now give your hands and feet and eyes and all your being not to the chopping block – but in service.

For your Saviour fought for you . . . and won.

Won back your life for you!

Your hands and feet and all that you are.

That all that you are be His.

And remember that most of all.

Yes, St. Michael and All Angels, who are fighting for you!

Yes, Pastor Rice, who is now fighting for you!

But most of all, your Saviour, who fought the fight, and won you.

The war of the Word on the cross.

For now, the battles continue. It's not easy. Satan knows his time is short, and so will fight all the more.

But the day of rest is coming.

The Strife is O'er, the Battle Done! (LW #143)

How good it is when someone fights for you!

Pray for your pastor. He'll need it!

And know that he will pray and fight for you.

God's blessings to you, Pastor Rice, and dear saints of Redeemer.

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