

Trinity XXI

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 October 2024

Preacher: Fr. Wade Miller

[0 : 00] The Lord made a promise, a covenant with Abraham, and part of that promise was that he was going to make the Israelite people into a great and mighty nation.

There were many detours and obstacles, however, in this promise becoming reality. There was the issue of the Israelites being enslaved in Egypt for over 400 years.

There was the problem of them wandering in the wilderness for over 40 years, fighting with each other, bickering, and disbelieving the word of the Lord.

But finally, as they looked to enter the promised land, their new leader, Joshua, who had replaced Moses, was told by God, Be strong and of good courage.

And again, be strong and very courageous. And again, have I not commanded you, be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

[1 : 16] I think we get the hint. Joshua and the people of God were to be strong and courageous. But let me remind you of what awaited the Israelite people in this land promise to them.

They would meet a ruthless pagan people who practiced barbarism in the very worst way. The land possessed those who offered child sacrifice to appease the god Malak, the Canaanite god.

The land was filled with people who raped and pillaged at will. The land was full of people who had no respect for human life, where war was waged on the most vulnerable, and where only the strongest and most brutal survived.

It was a land filled with the demonic, the spirit that had possessed Cain, Lamech, and the sons of men that we read about in the book of Genesis. It was a place where the perverted and disgusting ways of a ruthless people made them slowly exchange the image of God, so now they behaved like wild beasts and demonic savages.

And it's in that context, before entering into such a dark place, that the Lord tells Joshua, be strong and courageous.

[2 : 44] And so Joshua calls the Israelite people together as they prepare to enter into this land of Canaan. And he says to them, be strong and of good courage.

The Lord assures them that as long as they obey his word, he would fight for them and bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey. And that's why we read from our Old Testament text here from Isaiah chapter 59 about the Lord.

When we read, God is described here as a divine warrior who fights for his people.

Now, why do I tell you all this? Because this is the background that we heard here in our epistle text of Ephesians chapter 6.

Here in Ephesians chapter 6, we read, Finally, my brethren, be strong, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

[4 : 09] Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Notice the intentional language of St. Paul here in Ephesians chapter 6. He says what the Lord said to Joshua and what Joshua was to say to the people.

Be strong. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Oftentimes, when we hear Ephesians chapter 6, we focus solely on the six weapons that make up the armor of God.

There is great practical insight for Christians in studying this. But what I want to explore, which is really the theme of this sermon for this morning, is that we are called to not only be on the defensive, we are called to take the offensive.

That is, we are called to take the fight to the enemy. That's why St. Paul begins with the rallying cry, Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

[5 : 34] And we are further told that the offensive weapon that we are to use is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Beloved, you have already received this sword, this weapon, when you were baptized into Christ. You see, you gave an oath. You took vows to your divine warrior, Jesus.

As you were asked, Do you renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the sinful desires of the flesh, so that thou wilt not follow, nor be led by them?

And you answered, I renounce them all. And by God's help will endeavor not to follow, nor be led by them. You were then asked, Will you then obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of thy life?

And you answered, I will by God's help. You see, we were enlisted in a battle, where we sit not idly by, but we are called to take the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, and we are called to engage the enemy.

[6 : 57] This might make some of you a little uncomfortable using language of battle. It might sound a little too militant, especially in a day where political tensions seem to be very high.

But please do not hear that I'm advocating that we start a St. Philip's militia. That's not what I'm talking about. It's not the point at all.

You see, the battle we fight is not against flesh and blood. It's against principalities. It's against powers. It's against the rulers of this darkness of this age. It's against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

In other words, it's against those who seek to deceive, who call evil good and good evil. It's against Satan and his demonic army that roams about seeking to destroy, utilizing willing participants who are dishonest pawns that crave power.

What we are called to do is to take the word of God, that sword of the Spirit, which we received again in holy baptism, where we were incorporated into the word made flesh, Jesus the Christ, and allow Christ now to become our thoughts, our actions, our lives.

[8 : 19] Jesus has already given us our mission. As he said, go ye into all the world and preach the gospel, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all that I commanded and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

You see, those original disciples of our Lord who overcame Satan by way of the cross did not then sit in the upper room and contemplate about life.

They didn't just sit in the upper room after our Lord's ascension, waiting for him to come back. No, they received the Holy Spirit and then they were sent out to do what?

To preach, to speak the truth, and to speak the good news of our Lord, challenging the kingdom of the demonic by proclaiming that the delusional ideas of personal autonomy, power, sex, and riches are not the goal for human flourishing.

Rather, humility, trust, and obedience to Jesus who is King and Lord, that is the only way to true life, eternal life.

[9 : 47] And in calling people to follow the way, the way, by following Jesus and rejecting Satan and his kingdom of raw lust and power, manipulation, using people and calling people now as faithful soldiers of his kingdom, we are to use the weapons that he has given us.

And that one weapon, the sword of the spirit, the word of God. The disciples spoke truth in a world that craves falsehoods and we are called to do the very same.

They called sin, sin, in a world that calls it liberty and liberation, we are called to do the same. They called for the weak to come and to receive life while calling the powerful to repent and humble themselves before the true King of the universe, Jesus Christ, who is Lord over all.

Friends, that's our mission. That is our mission here. We are called to be strong and courageous and we are called to take the fight to the enemy even to the bowels of hell.

We are called to grow in communion with our God in Christ by being people who follow his word, who take our marching orders from him, not from the talk and the walking heads of our day.

[11 : 26] We are called to renounce Satan daily in living out our baptism, to speak the truth humbly, but to do so courageously. we are called to confess our sins, to seek to be good soldiers living always in the presence of our God.

And although we are to love our enemies, we are, and we are to bless those who persecute us, we are also called to be truth tellers, not just people to go along to get along.

We are called to expose the wickedness that manifests itself in people who act in complete deviance and the manipulation of others for personal gain, even if such people use religious lingo as they often do.

And we are called to give our lives. For the disciples, all but one meant martyrdom.

Dearly beloved, be strong. Be courageous. Take the sword of the spirit that you received in holy baptism, whereby you were knighted as warriors and go forth in the armor and protection of your divine warrior, Jesus the Christ.

[12 : 54] Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.