

## The First Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 2:1-5

Rev Joseph Highley

(transcribed from his sermon on Sunday, November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

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

Yesterday, December 7th, 1941, a date which will live in infamy, the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan. There would be a few more comments and then this in closing. Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger. With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph, so help us God. I ask that Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7th, 1941, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.

That day, December 8th, 1941, Congress would honor the request of those words from President Franklin Roosevelt and declare war on the Empire of Japan. Three days later, Congress would declare war on Germany and Italy thus launching the United States into World War II. War is a horrible thing.

As Edwin Star would say...

[You know it. I know it. Pastor begins singing.] War, huh? Yeah. What is it good for? Absolutely nothing. Say it again. Huh!

What is it good for? I will say war has its place at times. Ecclesiastes says, "There is a time and a place for everything, a time for peace and a time for war." Brothers and sisters, now is the time for war.

Our text this morning comes from Isaiah chapter two verses one through five. There are many angles we could take looking at this passage. It's a great passage from the prophet, Isaiah, talking about the mountain of the Lord. This morning, I want to take a slightly different approach than what I would maybe take, that's to look at an area of theology that we don't look at near as much as I think we should. The church militant. We're going to look at what that means, how the church fights this war and then how this war ends; the church at rest. So that's our plan this morning.

So first; church militant. What is it? We have two terms there. Church and militant. Second militant. You probably know what that means. Combatant and a conflict, particularly a war-like conflict.

The first thought, what about it? What is the church? We've talked about this a lot. We'll keep talking about it, a lot. The church is those who are all believers, across all times, in Jesus. They are those who believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. It is universal and timeless. Thus, you who are sitting here now, who believe, you are members of the Lord's Church. You are members of the Lord's army.

Did you know that? You have been drafted into this war, into this army, by means of your baptism. You have been called by God into his church. So that's what church means. So, church militant those two terms together, it's the church, the community of believers, at war. Our war, as Ephesians 6:12 puts it, is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against authorities, against cosmic powers over this present darkness. Against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

The church is at war. We are combatants in this conflict. It's been at war since Jesus ascended into heaven. It will stay at war until Jesus comes again. We are at war against the devil and his forces, against our sinful nature, against all that would turn us from our faith in our savior, Jesus. It is a violent, bloody, and dangerous war, and it has eternal consequences.

Like President Roosevelt's words helped formalize the state of war the United States was in against Japan, Germany, and Italy, so Jesus' parting words, cement the war that we are in. As he ascended into heaven, he said, "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." With that Christ ascended into heaven and gave us our marching orders. Launched the church officially into the end times war.

So, how do we, as the church militant, fight this war? Well, we have tools, we have a lot of tools at our disposal. We have weapons. We're going cover two just this morning. We can't cover all of them in every sermon, so we're going to cover two.

First and foremost, we have a sword.

[Pastor pulls a sword out from the pulpit and unsheathes it.]

We have a sword, not this sword, thankfully, because I think this is a practice sword. You have to ask John Bley. I think this is for like training purposes, training sword.

Still a really stinking cool sword. I mean, we got a sword. What is a sword? Well, a sword, St. Paul says, is the sword of the spirit. We have the sword of the spirit. What's the sword of the spirit? St. Paul says, the sword of the spirit is the word of God. We have the sword of the spirit. We have God's word that is our chief weapon in the fight. That's our best weapon in the fight.

And what is the word of God? What's the word of God? Not rhetorical. What's the word of God?

[The congregation answers] Jesus.

Jesus. That's right. The word of God is Jesus. John chapter one, the word is Jesus. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus, the son of God, taking on human flesh, dying on the cross, being buried, rising again, is here for his church. He is the word and he comes through us through the written word and the proclaimed word. He comes to us through the proclaimed, preached word of God, and through the Bible. He also comes to us through the word, through physical means. Means you can touch; the waters of baptism, in his body and blood in the bread and the wine.

God's word is a powerful weapon. It is God with us. Jesus, when he ascended into heaven, promised to always be with us, to the very end of the age. He is with us through his word and through his spirit.

When we sing, we often sing this in the holy, holy, holy, the sanctus and communion. We sing, Lord God of sabaoth now, that's not to be confused with the Lord God of the sabbath. Sabbath means rest. Sabaoth that means host and not like, oh, I'm going to host a party tonight, this might be a little stressful because we're going to have a lot of people. No, that means host, like the whole host of armies, the warriors, the legions of angels. Lord stands in for Yahweh, so he is Yahweh God of the armies, general God of the armies. He's our mighty general in this fight, and he leads us forward with his word.

It's our first tool. Second, we have the fellowship of believers in prayer. The fellowship of believers plays itself out in local churches across the world. You are part of this fellowship and we strengthen one another through the word, through our prayer together and through the forgiveness of one another's sins.

So with these two; God's word, the sword of the Spirit and the fellowship of believers, we have powerful weapons. These play themselves out through Jesus coming to us in word and sacrament, in scripture, through our mutual fellowship together. Here in just this community of believers we have so many opportunities to see this play out and be a part of. We have the full Divine Service here every single Sunday morning. This means we have communion, the Lord's Supper, every single Sunday. We practice the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. I'm waiting on a few babies to be born here that we can baptize. We also have adults come to faith as well. Several of the baptisms that we are celebrating today were adults who were baptized in the faith.

We proclaim God's word as truth. We have Sunday school nearly every Sunday as we dive into God's word in biblical doctrine. We have children's Sunday school, high school Sunday school, and confirmation just about every Sunday as well. During the week, we have Tuesday morning men's and women's Bible study, a Thursday morning women's Bible study, second

Monday night of the month an evangelism Bible study. Thursday nights we have a youngish adult Bible study. We have Wednesday nights with food and games for the youth, but more importantly, Bible study. We have a first and third Monday night open Bible study every single second Thursday at 2:00 PM, every single second Thursday of the month, 2:00 PM, in this church, we have the XYZ service. XYZ standing for extra years of zest, but it's for all ages for anyone who struggles to get here on Sunday morning or if you just want to have another service to go to. This is a slightly abbreviated, but only slightly abbreviated, but full Divine Service, meaning we have communion every second Thursday at 2:00 PM. Every Thursday morning at 9:00 AM we offer the service of Matins led by Chris Schelp.

During Advent, check out this thing in your announcements. We have an entire list of things that we're doing in Advent, not to mention the fact that we have advent services every Wednesday at 6:30 PM, Those 6:30 PM services this year, our theme is "Who is Jesus?" And we picked the most boring part of the Bible that you might think was boring and we turn it into a whole sermon series. Not me specifically. Someone else did. Matthew chapter one. And you have the whole list of names for seven verses, and it's like, I don't even know who half these people are and the ones I do know.... yeeesh... That's our sermon series.

"Who is Jesus?" Jesus is the son of David. He's the son of Solomon. He's the son of Ruth. He's the son of Tamar. He's the son of sinners. And that's our Wednesday night theme. Combining these Wednesday readings that we have, old Testament, new Testament, and Gospel, as well as our three readings plus Psalm on Sunday, we have an Advent devotional, very beautifully put together in blue for the advent season.

The most important part of this is that you read the Scripture. That's what the whole thing is about. Each one has "read that scripture," and then it has, here's the devotion. These devotional thoughts are just reflections, meditations from people all the way as young as Joy Schelp all the way as old as, I won't reveal that information. Including myself, including elders, including people that you maybe have never talked to, and you get to see what their reflection on this particular scripture is, what it means to them. What stands out to them.

This is our first week. Grab it. One of the tables outside either one of the doors from our sanctuary, "Who is Jesus?" Follow along as a community. We get to go through these verses preparing each week. My favorite part of this is that we get to all read whatever the coming readings are so that when we come to church, we get to go, oh yeah, I've been reading that. I've been thinking about that. Let it seep in, soak in just a little bit more.

Now, all those, those are offerings that we have as a church that are just very word specific. We have a whole list of fellowship opportunities as well. We have other sorts of Bible studies and service opportunities that happen as well.

We're going Christmas caroling. How cool is that? I can sing and no one's going to care that I don't sing well. I'll be offkey from everyone else and it's going to be awesome. The point is, get immersed in God's word. Get immersed in this community.

But pastor, I just kind of want to come to church and then kind of want to just go home, do my own thing.

That's not what God is calling you into. He's calling you to be part of his body, the church. That means he's calling you to be part of a family. He's calling you in you into a community that is tighter than any bond that this world has to offer. Tighter than any shared hobby or shared view or shared political view could offer.

It's the communion of Saints, communion bonded on the word of God and Christ's blood that washes us clean. It is our calling, our duty, our privilege to be a part of this church. And this is all the church militant. There's a passage in the prophet Joel chapter three, verse nine through 10 that says this, "Proclaim this among the nations consecrate for war. Stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near. Let them come up. Beat your plow shares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say, I am a warrior." Now, this passage isn't describing the church militant. It's actually describing the nations who would be destroyed by God and his armies.

But it describes the nature of this war and it uses language, this indicative of the church militant where our plow shares, our pruning hooks are beaten into swords and spears. The tools of rest and prosperity are exchanged for tools of violence. That's the picture of the church at war. That's the picture of the church militant. We are at war. We cannot rest. We cannot sit idly by. The war we're in sometimes seems subtle. Sometimes it's right in your face. Satan wants to turn you from God's word. Satan wants you to call what is good, evil, and what is evil, good. He wants you to embrace sin, to cherish it, and to withhold forgiveness from the repentant.

We see this every single day in our world. We see sinful behaviors being glorified. We see sinful behaviors being normalized. We see the uniqueness and beauty of male and female roles being attacked and swapped and switched. We see every sort of sexual behavior there is being normalized, slowly but surely to the most extreme and perverse expressions, when we see a man and a woman married, monogamous, having children and raising them in God's word is laughable, mocked.

We see hatred and violence rising all across our society. Hatred and offense being the currency of the day. Love simply becoming affirming someone with whatever they want to do, rather than love being service for the neighbor and lovingly, gently encouraging them in God's word. That's considered evil.

The enemy, the devil is twisting and perverting everything. That's his method. Unless we point fingers at the world outside these doors and just how evil they are and how holy we are, let

us look into our own hearts. It's how we have normalized and cherished sin in our own self. Where does that apply with you? Where does that apply with me?

This is all the work of the devil, and this is the war that we are in. This is our battle. On our own, it's a hopeless battle. Left long enough we would lose this battle. It's a battle worth fighting, even if it's a losing cause, but one that we would lose, we would be swallowed up by the devil in this world. But. But, and this is a big but, this is where our reading from Isaiah chapter two comes in. "It shall come to pass in latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains shall be lifted up above the hills and all the nations shall flow to it. And many people shall come and say, come and let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in His path. For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of God From Jerusalem, he shall judge between the nations and shall decide disputes for many peoples and they shall beat their swords into plow shares and they're spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war anymore. O, house of Jacob, come let us walk in the light of the Lord."

This my brothers and sisters is a picture of the church at rest. This is the prophecy that we eagerly await. The time is coming. We get a taste of it, even now in God's word and in the body and blood of Jesus at the altar. When this is coming true.

Can you feel it? Close your eyes. Can you picture it? The mountain of the Lord. We dwell with him. We trade in our sword and our spear for a plow share and a pruning hook. Tools of violence for tools of peace and prosperity, tools of farming and working the land in peace and quietness. And this day is coming.

Jesus our Lord, the crucified one, he died for your sins. He died for the sins that would leave us all alone in this fallen and darkened world, fighting on the wrong side of the war, fighting against the church militant. The same Jesus, he rose again and he forgives you all of your sins. He washes you clean, he drafts you into his army, into the church, and this Jesus ascended into heaven and this Jesus is coming back.

When he does, the days of the church, militant will be over. The church will be at rest, the church will be triumphant. And how do I know the church will win this war? Because the church has already won this war. Because Jesus has already won this war. Unlike any other war. The ending of this war was written before it even began. We knew exactly how it would end before the war even began, and it ends in Jesus' victory. Vanquishing his enemies to eternal destruction and gathering the believers of all nations to his holy mountain to live with him in truth and light.

Brothers and sisters, this is a wearisome some fight that we are in at times. It often seems like the world around us is winning and it seems like our own sin has defeated us. Take heart. You are a baptized child of God. Jesus loves you. He died for you and rose for you. And he gives

you victory in this fight. Take refuge and strength in his church, in this community and in his word. Be refreshed, just for a moment here at this altar, by his body and his blood that we're about to receive. Be refreshed for eternity in receiving his body and blood here at this altar. You are the church militant. Fight the good fight. Persevere. Be vigilant. You will be the church at rest. You will be the church victorious. It is already written. You will dwell on the mountain of the Lord in triumph. Amen.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts, your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.