

**Isaiah 42:13** *The Lord will march out like a champion, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

Nobody likes war. I think the vast majority of people, regardless of your political views, would agree that war should be avoided at all costs. But there are times in a world like ours where war becomes necessary. When you have an enemy that is bound and determined to impose its will on a people and infringe on their rights and kill their people, war and force are the only way to stop them. While conversations and negotiations would be a preferable way to resolve the differences, some people only respond to force. Unfortunately in our world, there is a time when war is the only option.

This holds true not only in the physical world but in the spiritual world as well. This season of Lent brings before our minds the greatest war that has been fought in the history of the world. It's a war that started a long time ago and has claimed victims in the billions over the years. It's a war that started right after the beginning of time and will continue until time ends. It's a war that included the single most horrendous and world-changing battle of all time. It's a war between God and the devil for the souls of every single human. From the time the devil first rebelled against God, he and his demons have been hellbent on destroying as many souls as possible by separating them from God to live forever in hell. God had no choice but to go to war against the devil on behalf of his people. This was the only way to win the war and rescue his people from an eternity separated from him. During Lent, we have a front row seat to this epic battle for the salvation of our souls. Throughout this season, we plan to take a closer look at how this greatest war was fought as it headed toward the final showdown. At the center of this war is one person: ***The Promised Warrior***.

You know the history well. God had created the perfect world for his perfect people, Adam and Eve. God had brought them together in marriage to a perfect blessing for one another. He placed them in a beautiful garden where they would find joy and fulfillment by tending to the garden in thanks for God's gracious gifts. Then along came a snake—the devil—whose only goal was to destroy this perfection. Using lies, deceit and trickery he led Adam and Eve to look at the fruit differently than what God had intended. Instead of seeing the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as a way for them to worship God by not eating, they began to see it as good for food and pleasing to the eye. So they ate. And in doing so, they lost the battle. Sin entered into the once-perfect world and with it came death. From that time on, every single person ever born would be born in sin: spiritually blind, spiritually dead and enemies of God. They would be destined for hell from the moment of their conception. It seemed like the devil had won.

Yet immediately after that lost battle, God promised the devil that He would send someone much stronger than Adam and Eve who would take the battle to the devil and would crush his head and destroy him forever. You are familiar with the promise: *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* (Genesis 3:15). By the time Isaiah came to preach, God's people had been waiting 2,700 years for the warrior who would come to destroy the devil. It was a great time for God to remind the people of the champion whom he would send who was not only going to fight the battle but win the war. The conflict God predicted wasn't going to be pretty. It wasn't going to be a discussion. It wasn't going to be a negotiation settlement. It would be a bloody struggle to the death between the devil and the warrior who would come from Eve's family line. The end result would be that Satan's head would be crushed. He would go down violently in defeat. But for that to happen, a war needed to be fought.

In Lent, we have a front row seat to this battle. We see our champion, the promised warrior, marching out to do battle on our behalf. Throughout his life, we watched him actively engage the devil by facing his temptations and standing firm against them. As he goes forward to the final battle which would solidify the outcome of the war, we see Jesus passively engaging the devil by allowing him to throw everything at him, even death itself. We watch the struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus wrestled the devil and his flesh as he sought strength and help from his Father in prayer. We see Jesus willingly allow himself to be arrested and bound as a common criminal. We see the injustice in the courtroom and terrible pain and suffering inflicted on him by the soldiers. We see Jesus nailed to the cross and face the ridicule and mockery of the religious leaders and Roman soldiers. We see him face his heavenly Father abandoning him as he suffered hell and finally give himself over to death. All of this is God's promised warrior doing battle on your behalf to win the war against sin and death and render the devil powerless against God's people once and for all. The only way to defeat the devil was to go head to head against him and remain perfect and holy. The only warrior who could do that was Jesus, the warrior whom God had promised who willingly went out to do battle on our behalf.

We marvel at this warrior! Yet what is key in this story and important for us ponder as we think about this warrior and what makes this warrior even that much more amazing is to remember why this battle was necessary. It was necessary not only because Adam and Eve sinned. It was necessary because you and I sin! Ash Wednesday starts with a strong call to repentance to purge us of that desire to play the victims and blame Adam and Eve for our problems and to cause us to look deep inside of ourselves, exam the lives we lead and come to the conclusion that this isn't just Adam and Eve's fault, but ours as well. What lies deep inside of our heart is what also plagued them. The Bible calls it sin. No medical procedures

can remove it. A surgeon's knife cannot cut it out. There is no drug that will remove it and radiation cannot burn it out of us. It's our enemy of the worst kind, and it has enemy relatives that come along with it: the devil, our corrupt world and finally death. There is no peace treaty possible with this deadly enemy. The only way to destroy it is to go to war against it. Yet you and I are not strong enough to do so. The only way to defeat this enemy is to face it perfectly...and we cannot do that. The purpose of the season of Lent is to give us the opportunity to think about our lives, to take on a fresh zeal toward repentance and prepare for Holy Week. In doing this, we are reminded of how the sin inside of us plagues us. We are reminded that there are forces at work inside of us that are constantly working to drag us down and damn us eternally. We are reminded that alone, we are powerless against these forces and will be lost eternally. This season serves to remind us that we need somebody to is real and more powerful and bigger than us to go fight in our place. This battle is real and it is for our lives now and eternally.

Our joy and confidence as we ponder all of this is that we know exactly how this battle played out. Isaiah and the people who heard his words could only look forward to the future with the confidence that God would send the warrior as he promised who would win the war for them. Our joy is looking back and knowing God did exactly what he promised and sent the warrior to defeat the devil. We've watched this battle play out year after year. Yet it never gets old. It never ceases to amaze us or be beautiful to us. We treasure this scene because it solidifies our eternity! Our champion went forward to fight the battle and he was victorious. How chilling that battle cry our warrior shouted from Calvary's cross: "*It is finished!*" Everything that needed to be done to secure our salvation and defeat the devil had been done perfectly and completely by our promised warrior. The long-promised warrior came as the champion and won the war for our souls. It wasn't easy and it wasn't pretty. It wasn't without great pain. But he came and conquered not only Satan but death and hell and has graciously given that victory to us through faith.

The war has been won! The outcome is secure. What confidence this gives to us as the battles continue. We know that we will not enjoy the fullness of this victory until the Lord calls us from this world to enjoy the eternity of heaven. So the battles that you and I have to fight against the devil, the world and our sinful flesh wage on. Day after day, temptations confront us. Time and again, we fall prey to the devil's lies and the world's lures. Our sinful desires wage against our intentions of living as God's people. It's easy to become weary and exhausted of fighting this seemingly never ending battle. Be refreshed and renewed as God's people for the battle that you fight. Your warrior carried your load of sin on his shoulders and won the battle. God promised you that eternal life is yours and you will bask in the joy and glory of his victory forever.

So let this season of Lent be a time of refreshing and renewal for you. Rejoice as you see the promised warrior go forward again to win the war against sin and give the victory to you through faith. As you ponder your sins which made this war necessary, rejoice in God's love who provided eternal peace and safety through the Promised Warrior. Amen.