

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Watertown, WI**

**“Spiritual Food for Spiritual Warfare”**

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*“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:10-12).*

Against overwhelming forces and weaponry, Ukrainian soldiers are fighting for their lives.

So are you.

There is a very real war being waged. What Paul calls “the spiritual forces of evil” are lined up against us. My fear, however, is that many of us are oblivious to this spiritual warfare and therefore ill-equipped, poorly trained, and even on a self-imposed starvation diet. Left to ourselves, we wouldn’t be able to put up much of a fight.

Paul writes, “Be strong in the Lord . . . that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil” (Eph. 6:10ff).

The Church has earthly opponents, but also those “spiritual forces of evil” against us. These dark forces are highly motivated (they hate us and seek to destroy us). They are also armed to the teeth with all sorts of sinister weapons. Meanwhile, we seem indifferent. Instead of preparing and training, we slather ourselves with sunscreen and play ball on Sunday mornings. We launch the boat or go out to Sunday brunch when we should be in worship and Bible Study. We gaze endlessly into our screens but make little time for God’s Word and Sacraments.

Imagine if Ukrainian President Zelensky were to tell his troops, “Once every two or three weeks, we’re going to provide you with a feast . . . more food than you could ever eat. Unfortunately, you’ll not be eating anything in between those meals. You’ll just have to make do without.” It’d be absurd! To fight, we need regular nourishment. No army can win a war on one meal a month, even if it were an all you can eat buffet.

But isn’t that exactly what many of us are attempting to do? If our only connection to God’s Word and Sacrament comes infrequently, how can we expect to prevail against the “spiritual forces of evil”?

Jesus said, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4). And in John 6, Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (v. 35). The worship service *is* a great feast. And I’m so glad you are here to receive it today. And I hope you’re here next week and the week after that and the week after that, to receive the absolution of sins, the preaching, reading, and singing of God’s Word, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, the prayers for the whole people of God and for the world, the fellowship of the saints, the study of God’s Word in between services . . . it’s all spiritual nutrition. It’s the nourishment we need to sustain us for the fight. Therefore, God says “Honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” It’s not an option. It’s His commandment.

If regular worship attendance for you means about every other week, that means you are fasting for thirteen days without any spiritual nourishment between. If you miss two weeks in a row, you are starving yourself for three weeks.

If you have children on travelling sports teams, you know how that makes worship nearly impossible. Driving them all around for the competitions can be considered selfless service. It can be quality time. But it can also be depriving them and yourselves of true spiritual nourishment.

When we keep rejecting the gifts of God in favor of sports or screens or work, are we not like the wedding guests in the parable who spurn the king’s invitation to the wedding feast? They trot out one excuse after another, but the King is unimpressed and angered by their indifference.

Sometimes we’re ill or immobilized by age, or there can be an ice storm . . . then it’s best to stay home. But otherwise, when we exclude ourselves from the King’s feast, Luther simply calls it “despising God’s Word”. “We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.”

Meanwhile, our spiritual enemies carry on with their assaults. Just as Russia continues with a relentless bombardment of artillery, so also the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh continue pounding away at us. They will not give a summer reprieve. The “spiritual forces of evil” will tempt you to turn bits of God’s good creation into idols. They will shape your attitudes and beliefs through slanted news, social media, warped values, shifting cultural agendas. They will encourage you to confuse alcohol with happiness, infatuation with love. They will elevate your own fears and desires into false gods. Your children won’t have to go looking for porn on the internet because it will already have come looking for them. Still, the bombardment continues, and many of us, it seems, are rather oblivious and indifferent to it all.

Consider this: we have a congregation of about 875 members on the books. In the last month, we’ve never had more than 185 in worship. I don’t think that means 700 of us are sick, and the weather isn’t that bad out there, and I know the churches up north are not having to set up chairs in the narthex. I think it means many are on a self-imposed starvation diet.

A few months ago, Jacklyn and I were checking out of a Madison grocery store, and the young cashier was as thin a person I’ve ever seen. She appeared emaciated, morbidly so. Her legs were like spindles. Her skin was stretched tight over her exposed collarbones. Her fingers were like pencils with joints. Her eyes were sunken and listless. It was so sad. It looked like anorexia, and if so, she probably felt fat. When she looked at herself in the mirror she probably saw herself as bloated and overweight. My guess is she had no appetite either.

I wonder if that’s the way it works with spiritual nutrition. We can be on a starvation diet and feel fine, sated, fat even, not at all in danger. And so, days without the bread of God’s Word can turn into weeks, and soon, the vital organs start shutting down.

Maybe it has something to do with how we think of worship. Maybe we assume we’re supposed to be entertained, but I don’t see God’s prophets and apostles trying to entertain their listeners. Maybe we think it should very, very moving and memorable. I don’t remember what I ate for lunch one month ago today, but I know I was fed. I know I didn’t go hungry. Or maybe we think of worship as just another duty or obligation, something to check off the list.

As a child, we always sat up in the balcony of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church. When the smell of the extinguished candles finally reached my nostrils, it was a happy moment. It meant the service was finally over. I could go home smug with the idea that I had just done God a favor by worshipping Him and presumably He owes me one now. (I was a great sinner for so small a boy.)

Clearly, I had it all wrong. God doesn’t need my worship or yours. He is worthy of our worship. He is the only being that truly deserves our worship. He expects our worship. But He does not need our worship. Worship is for **our** benefit, not His. In the worship services, God is the One who serves **us**. That’s why we call it “Divine Service.” The Lord has come to our world and this church to serve us. Jesus said He came into the flesh not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mt. 20:28). On the cross He offered Himself as a spotless sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. Through His perfect life and death, He accomplished forgiveness and salvation for all. Seated now at the Father’s right hand, He graciously serves His Church with the gifts of salvation in the Divine Service.

At Holy Baptism, He puts His name on us. He adopts us and claims us. He pours His Holy Spirit into our hearts, and rescues us from our enemies of sin, death, and the devil.

Through Holy Absolution, He pronounces His forgiveness to us again and again. With His holy Word, He proclaims His abiding love for us through all the joys and sorrows of life. In His Supper, He gives us His own body and blood to eat and drink, to nourish and strengthen us. What is good for the soul is also good for the body.

It’s all true food. From our Gospel, “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” A priceless gift He gives in such humble means. It’s like Bethlehem, the Son of God wrapped in humble cloth and lying in a manger. Similarly, today He gives His gifts to us to help us withstand the assaults of the spiritual forces.

Don’t we want to receive those gifts as often as we can with thanksgiving and praise? Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you . . . whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (Jn. 6:53-56). It’s all true spiritual food for the spiritual warfare. It’s His food. It’s His strength.

Our text says, “Be strong in the Lord.” Do not rely on your own strength for this warfare. “Be strong in the Lord.” Week in, week out, let him feed and nourish you. Amen.