

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We are at war, though our eyes betray us. We don't see the physical destruction like what is taking place in far off Ukraine: towns and villages wholly destroyed, families decimated, uprooted. War has horrific consequences. It's what makes war something to be avoided if possible and stopped as soon as possible.

Thinking about this brought to mind a Star Trek episode, In "A Taste of Armageddon." In it, the Enterprise is tasked with establishing diplomatic relations with two worlds. Little did they know that these two worlds had been warring for 500 years. But they had done away with all the destruction. They waged war with computers. One world would attack the other, and the computers would tally up the casualties. The casualties were then to report to disintegration chambers — a war very neat and tidy.

In the episode, the Enterprise became a casualty of the war, and the planet's leaders wanted the crew to beam down for disintegration. Captain Kirk wasn't having it. He orchestrated events that threatened to bring back the horrors of war: "disaster, disease, starvation, horrible lingering death, pain and anguish" (dialogue from episode). The leaders were so frightened of these consequences that they began negotiations to end the war.

We Christians are at war, and sometimes it may seem as if our war, too, is neat and tidy. It may seem that way because ours is not a physical war. We don't see those kinds of physical consequences. Our war is a spiritual one, as St. Paul says, "*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. 6:12).

These "*spiritual forces of evil*" are the devil and his demon army who, allied with "the world, and our sinful nature" try to keep us from hallowing God's name, from believing in Jesus and leading Godly lives. This trio of enemies mocks the Holy Trinity as it schemes to "deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice" (Luther, Small Catechism, 3rd & 6th Petitions).

And don't be fooled. The destruction may not be the same as in a physical war, but there is destruction. Luther just identified several — first, the destruction of faith, for faith leads to life. "*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life*" (John 3:36). Jesus says, "*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*" (John 10:10). On the other hand, Satan and those whom he enlists into his service come "*only to steal and kill and destroy*" (John 10:10). Yes, the devil works to steal away our faith, and if he succeeds, we are left with despair, a loss of hope that leads to eternal death and destruction.

But Christians need not despair — in Christ, “*faith, hope, and love abide*” (1 Cor. 13:13). “*Resist [the devil], firm in your faith*” (1 Pet. 5:9), for in Christ, we have hope, even in the face of suffering and death, for God uses our suffering to strengthen us, and build us up, and to give us hope, not for this life only but for eternity (Rom. 5:3-4). And even though death brings us to tears, we don’t despair. We grieve, but we do not lose hope. Our hope remains fixed on Jesus; our hope is in resurrection and life — Jesus’ and our own through faith in Him (1 Thess. 4:14). In Christ, “*Death is swallowed up in victory.*” In Christ, we have the victory (1 Cor. 15:54, 57). In Christ, death gives way to life.

Second, our enemies try to deceive and mislead us into “false belief,” pointing us, say, to our own efforts or good works, thus diverting our eyes from “*the founder and perfecter of our faith, who ... endured the cross, despising the shame,*” who rose triumphant over death and the grave, who “*is seated at the right hand of the throne of God*” (Heb. 12:2), who will come again in glory as our judge. These enemies pervert and twist the Scriptures to scratch our “*itching ears*” that we might follow after our “*own passions*” rather than “*sound teaching*” (2 Tim. 4:3). But “*whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God,*” says St. James; “*Submit yourselves ... to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*” (James 4:4, 7);

Third, our enemies want to mislead us to other great shame and vice. They want us to believe that life in the womb is not valuable enough to be protected and preserved. They want us to believe that the pursuit of our own hedonistic pleasures is the most important pursuit in life. They want us to approve of debaucherous books and displays and to train up our children in them. They want us to believe that we can overturn God’s primordial design by our own desires, and so, give approval to the mutilation of our bodies. They want us to turn aside in the face of lawlessness and stay silent, lest we be cancelled and lose our livelihood. What was unimaginable and unspeakable only a few short years ago has found fertile soil in recent years. We cannot let our enemies have the victory; we must fight on.

Indeed, would that our war could be ended as easily as Captain Kirk’s solution — it cannot be. That war had gone on for 500 years; ours has been going on since Eve and Adam ate of the forbidden fruit and caused the fall of man. Truly, “the fight is fierce, the warfare long” (LSB 677:5). Suing for peace wouldn’t work anyway; the devil doesn’t want peace with us. He’s already lost; he knows his demise; he wants company, but we won’t give it to him. And so, this war will continue on until Christ comes again in glory to relegate “*the devil ... his angels,*” and all the cursed to “*the eternal fire*” prepared for them (Matt. 25:41).

Until then, we fight ... but not alone. For when God created all things, He made also the holy angels. And though many followed Satan in his foolhardy rebellion,

*“innumerable angels”* did not (Heb. 12:22), and *“those who are with us are more than those who are with”* our enemies (2 Ki. 6:16). The angels are holy (Luke 9:26), and they are mighty (Ps. 103:20). They *“do [God’s] word”*; they obey *“the voice of his word.”* They are the Lord’s army *“who do his will.”* We rejoice in them, for they fight for us; they are God’s *“ministers”* sent to serve His elect (Heb. 1:14).

More than that, in their cosmic fight, a victory has already been won. *“Michael and his angels [fought] against the dragon,”* and the dragon *“was defeated.”* He was thrown down with all his angels. Still, he writhes and squirms and wreaks all kinds of havoc. Still, he lies and deceives and accuses. But we will not fall into despair, for we have hope — we know the blood of the Lamb has defeated Him, and we know that this Lamb lives and reigns.

Still more, we know that the ancient serpent can’t abide the truth: the kingdom of God has come near to us in the person of Jesus. This is the *“word of [the apostles’] testimony,”* and it is also a mighty weapon against this old evil foe — Paul calls it *“the sword of the Spirit,”* and with it and the whole armor of God, we are *“strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might”* (Eph. 6:10, 17). This word about Jesus is that with which Jesus sent out the 72, and they returned rejoicing for *“the demons [were] subject to [them] in [Jesus’] name,”* and *“Satan,”* again, fell *“like lightning from heaven.”* Jesus promised the apostles *“authority ... over all the power of the enemy.”* We, who are built on their apostolic authority, now wield that same power! Armed with this word, with the holy angels beside us, *“the evil foe [can have] no power over us”* (Luther’s Morning Prayer). The victory is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this victory, therefore, we can sing with David and the whole church in earth and heaven: *“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. ... Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!”* (Ps. 103:1-5, 22)!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.