**Third Sunday of End Time – Saints Triumphant**

**Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY November 17, 2013**

**Based on 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5 written by Vicar Ben Zuberbier**

**The Spirit’s work triumphs!**

1. **Planned from the beginning**
2. **Through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ**
3. **Strengthening until glory**

*1 3But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. 16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. 3:1 Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. 2 And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4 We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. 5 May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.*

Have you ever heard of sports hypnosis? It’s a tactic athletes use when they’re training for an upcoming match, game, tournament or competition. Sports hypnosis is visualizing yourself defeating your opponent.

In 1973, when Ken Norton had an upcoming match against the defending champion, Muhammad Ali, he trained extensively. He spent countless hours training at the gym, working on his footwork, technique, defense, and speed. He did strength training in the weight room. But he didn’t ignore the mental side of his training either. He put aside time each day for sports hypnosis to picture himself knocking Ali out. And it paid off! In the eleventh round he broke Ali’s jaw with a perfectly placed hook! And by split decision, the judges declared Norton the winner. Norton triumphed!

Now how about you? How do you feel you’re doing in the ring? Do you feel confident that you have that edge over your spiritual opponent? After all, you spend time training in the Word. You hold God accountable to his promises that you will stand firm in the ring against Satan’s punches. And you’re equipped to fight back. Overall, you feel confident, your heart’s in it, and you’re strong enough to hold your ground as a Christian.

But then Satan starts landing a few jabs and you begin to lose confidence and heart. He takes a few jabs at your family life, and what used to seem so perfect and peaceful is now filled with tension. He then attacks your health and each day has that added struggle. He lands a few more jabs and it affects your financial security, and fills you with worry and doubt that God will provide. And as these jabs hit you, you start to lose your strength, but you’re still latching to God’s promise that Satan will never knock you down.

But then the unexpected happens. He lands a massive uppercut that you didn’t see coming. Your house is getting foreclosed on, your marriage is coming to an end, a close family member passed, your best friend is moving, you’re depressed and have lost hope. You’re knocked to the mat and lie face down while the ref counts, “1-2-3.” You try to get back up but your strength is gone, your confidence is shattered, your heart and passion are lost, and it seems hopeless as the devil stands over you and it looks like he’s going to triumph. You’re all alone and there’s no one there to help you to your feet.

But when you’ve lost all strength, confidence, and heart, remember the encouraging words of the Apostle Paul from this morning. He reminds you you’re not alone, that you’ll get back up and continue fighting and you’ll triumph over your opponent.

1. **Planned from the beginning**

You see, God actually planned that you would triumph from the beginning. He put together a game plan before the creation of the world, before your opponent even existed, and before the champion would even enter the ring, **“because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (v 13)**.

And God’s game plan looked like this: “Well, those I chose won’t be able to stand in the ring against Satan on their own, so I’ll have to bring another in to fight for them. I’ll send my Son into the ring, he’ll willingly go. And then I’ll have my Spirit be the utility player. He’ll be the one to strengthen my Son at certain times in the match. He’ll be the one to announce my Son’s match through the Word, and he’ll strengthen them, give them heart, and refresh their hope and confidence, they’ll no doubt need it as they square off with Satan in their lives.”

1. **Through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ**

So God executed his game plan. When it was the right time, his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ came down to earth and entered the arena as a human being like one of us to take Satan on in our place. He went toe-to-toe with Satan when he was weak and tired. Satan took three jabs at him but Christ countered with three hooks that sent Satan crawling out of the ring. And as the rounds passed, he stood his ground when religious leaders, angry villagers, and Romans took body shots. And when he entered the final round, Satan unloaded on him with a flurry of punches—condemnation to death by his own people, beatings by the Roman guards, nails through his hands and feet, when he hung on the cross, those gathered around him threw trash talk up at him, the overbearing weight of the sins of the whole world, and the final uppercut (death).

But he triumphed! He descended into hell and entered Satan’s facility holding up the title belt before the eyes of those he defeated. And when he rose three days later, he burst forth from the tomb claiming the glory of victory, proclaiming victory and triumph over Satan. And when he ascended into heaven, he left the work of announcing this victory to the Holy Spirit.

And the Holy Spirit would bring this message to people who were fighting in the ring all alone. He would work through the through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring those up against the ropes to faith in their Savior, who conquered the devil in their place. And he carried out this work with you and me here today. He brought you to faith through the message of the gospel of your Lord Jesus Christ through the teaching and preaching of the Word. And he placed you on team Jesus, when he wrote his name on you through the Sacrament of Baptism. Through all this, the Holy Spirit’s Work through the gospel triumphed over unbelief.

1. **Strengthening until glory**

And when Satan starts throwing jabs at your life and wearing down your confidence and strength as Christians, when he lands those massive uppercuts and puts you face down on the mat and it seems you’ve lost all heart, hope, and strength to get up, the Spirit’s work strengthens you until you will triumph in glory.

When your heart just isn’t in it anymore. When it feels like you’ve lost all passion to fight, the Holy Spirit redirects your **“hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.” (v 5)** Think about the passion God had for you to triumph. Think about his love, his game plan. He sent his Son Jesus Christ to fight in your place. Think about how Christ willingly and perfectly executed this game plan. Think about how he persevered when Satan and his other enemies threw their punches. Think about Christ’s heart and passion in the ring for you. That’s how you regain your heart and passion.

And like a boxer needs to have a strong defense: rock hard abs, the ability to block punches, and to counter punches, so also the Holy Spirit gives you a strong defense. When others talk trash about you, your faith, your Savior, about the gospel of your Lord Jesus Christ, he gives you God’s irrefutable Word to block their taunts, since God’s Word contains no contradictions, it counters their arguments. When your opponents take real punches: when they punch or hit you on the playground, when they vandalize your bike or car, when they break into your house, the Holy Spirit gives you counter punches. But we don’t punch back, the Spirit’s counterpunches are described like this, **“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on the cheek, turn to him the other also” (Luke 6:27-29).** You see, the Spirit’s punches are not thrown out of revenge, but out of love. The Spirit’s punches aren’t punches at all. They’re acts of kindness to those who do those who are throwing punches at you.

And as your match and mine goes on, as you and I endure round after round, the Holy Spirit will strengthen you so you can stand firm. He will give you the strength to stay off the ropes, so you can hold your position in the center of the ring, taking the jabs, hooks, body shots, and uppercuts and yet hold your position. He will give you the strength to stand firm through God’s Word. To hold on to the teachings your pastors and Sunday school teachers passed on to you. To go back to those sections of Scripture where you find strength. To cherish the passages you’ve grown to love and memorize. That’s what the Apostle Paul is talking about in verse 15, **“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by the word of mouth or by letter” (v 15).** The Holy Spirit strengthens you through God’s Word so you can hold your position.

And right now, we’re not just in the ring alone. We don’t stand across from Satan by ourselves. He gives us tag-team partners. These partners are your family members, these partners are your Christian friends, the members of this congregation, the members of our synod, these partners are all believers in Christ. You see, we stand together in the ring and we fight together against Satan. When the team of believers fights together in the ring, Satan doesn’t stand a chance. So remember, I got your back, you got mine, you got his back, she has yours, your mom has yours, and you have hers, your brother has yours and you have his—we stand together. The Holy Spirit strengthens you and me through teamwork. And we train together at worship, Bible Study, and Sunday school.

And when you enter the final round, when Satan throws his final punches, stand firm, because soon you will have the title belt in your hands. You will claim the glory of victory. Soon you will stand together with all the Saints and with Jesus in heaven. Soon you will stand in triumph over Satan and his attacks. And he will lay unresponsive on the mat for the rest of time.

This morning we confidently pray that the Holy Spirit’s work will triumph. We use the words of Hymn 219, **“Lord, when your glory I shall see and taste your Kingdom’s pleasure. Your blood my royal robe shall be. My joy beyond all measure! When I appear before your throne, your righteousness shall be my crown; with these I need not hide me. And there, in garments richly wrought, as your own bride I shall be brought to stand in joy beside you.”** Amen.