**Isaiah 42:13; 59:15-17** February 26, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Ash Wednesday

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

 *59:15The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. 16He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. 17He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**The Promised Warrior**

 On Thanksgiving Day, a tree fell over in our neighbor’s yard. Not a big tree, but big enough for firewood. I went over and asked if we could dispose of it for them. They were only too glad, so my boys and I went over with a chain saw, we cut up the tree. We brought the logs back and then got out the splitting ax. I am proud of my boys. Noah and Jacob had a great time getting started on that wood. But after watching for a while I finally had to say, “Boys, give me that thing!” And I took that ax and showed them how real log splitting gets done.

 It was just after half time in a high school football game. The home team was up 21-0. Then the visitors, who had done nothing the entire first half, on their first drive of the second half marched down the field and scored. The home team got the ball, but went three and out. Now the visitors got the ball back in good field position. Fans were getting nervous. The game was slipping away. And then—then the coach sent them back in, the first team, the starters. For his own reasons, at half time the coach had benched the entire first team. With the second team on the field a sure victory had been slipping away. Now the first team re-took the field. They were pumped. They were shouting. They were exuberant. “Give us our game back!” they shouted. Nothing personal against us second-stringers, but the starters wanted to take their hard-fought lead to the end. Victory was theirs!

 This evening, our reading obviously wants those sorts pictures in our minds. It wants us to picture the throne room of heaven. The Lord God sits on his throne and in a frustrated fury says to humanity, “Give me that thing before you hurt yourselves. Get off the field before you lose everything! I—I will arise and work your salvation.” Or in the words of our reading, ***“The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation.”*** This is about how we will be saved.

 Remember, however, that the Holy Spirit spoke these words through the prophet Isaiah 700 years before Jesus’ birth. Isaiah was not speaking about the Messiah like we speak of the Messiah, the Promised One. When we speak of the Messiah, we look back. We see his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection. We know how it all turned out. Isaiah didn’t. When Isaiah spoke of a future deliverer, the Holy Spirit borrowed Isaiah’s body, his pen, his voice. The Holy Spirit predicted the deliverance of the Lord. Isaiah, and we, we look to the spiritual battlefield and we see

**The Promised Warrior**

 Now that’s a little strange. Oh, we are very used to—and rightly so—pictures of our Savior as the Good Shepherd, as a refuge for the weary, as the welcomer of sinners and defender of the repentant. On the road to Calvary we know that he was silent before Herod, that he returned no answer to those who struck him, that he prayed for forgiveness for those who nailed him to the hideous posts. Because he is so accepting of people and so submissive to an unjust death our human eyes can misunderstand. Some people would be repulsed to think of Jesus as a warrior. But a warrior is what we needed.

 We have to remember the situation. ***“The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene.”*** The Lord God looked and saw no one to intervene on our behalf. We were and are and shall continue to be until the end of this world, sinners; sinners falling short of the glory of God. We deserve only condemnation and punishment from the One who created us. And we can’t do a thing about it!

 This is why as we lament our own sinfulness on Ash Wednesday, we also celebrate the Promised Warrior. The Promised One did not come to rescue a bunch of innocent victims. He didn’t come for blameless hostages in the grasp of evil terrorists. He came to save people who were about to get what they deserved. “The wages of sin are death,” the Good Book says.

 Because it was divine judgment, it couldn’t be changed. There was no hope for a retrial. No. The punishment had to be paid, the sentence completed. Someone was going to have to die because of our sin. ***“So his own arm worked salvation.”***

 That’s why Lord’s Promised Warrior looks different from what we expect in a warrior. That’s why his battle turned out differently than how we usually measure a soldier’s success. God’s Promised Warrior was a hero who went into battle ferociously, furiously, knowing not that he might die, but that he certainly would die. In one of those hymns that we don’t sing often enough, Martin Luther pictured the Warrior’s commissioning this way:

He [the Father] spoke to his beloved Son:

 “’Tis time to have compassion.

Then go, bright Jewel of my crown,

 And bring mankind salvation.

From sin and sorrow set them free;

 Slay bitter death for them that they

May live with you forever." (CW 377:5)

 As he marches out to war, the Promised Warrior will show no mercy to his enemies. He will give no quarter to evil. There is no weakness in him, no chink in his armor. He will succeed. Isaiah portrays him as the perfect warrior, ***“The LORD will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.”***

 This is the promised warrior: to his people he is gentle; to his “fate” (please understand that word correctly) submissive; but to his enemies, devastating.

 So Ash Wednesday, while a day of repentance, is not a day of hopelessness.

 It is a day to sorrow over our sin. It is a day for us to examine ourselves, to contemplate the many ways we have fallen short of God’s law. We are right to go down the Ten Commandments and tick each of them off, “Yep, broke that one, and that one, and, ooh, that one I really have a tough time with.” But we never do it light-heartedly. How could we? Jesus *died* because of those sins. Jesus fought heroically, victoriously, but he died.

 There is a crucial part of Ash Wednesday that comes after we have absorbed all of this truth. After we have confessed, and after we have heard that someone else rescued us from the fires of hell, then we resolve to live for him. Sadly, we do not live perfectly. But in our faltering, stammering way we live for him.

 For what is it you do on Memorial Day? When you remember the soldier who died for his nation, do you say, “Who cares?” Do you say, “Well, tough for him”? Do we live unappreciative? Of course not! And anyone who has seen The Promised Warrior, our Savior going to the cross, then looks at his own life and says, “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.” Amen.