

For about a month in Kapustan Yar the Russian army is holding training drills. Air and coastal defense units are gathering for combined training that will culminate in live firing drills. 3500 troops and 1000 units of military hardware will be used. The Russians claim it's just a training drill that was long planned. We might believe that if this wasn't all happening just 280 miles from the tense Ukrainian border where threats of war have been uttered for the past couple of weeks. Don't look now but its war out there.

There's one who has been training for war for a long time. Not war with another country using guns, tanks, or planes. This is spiritual warfare and it's for something far more important than control of resources or power. This is for the soul of each and every person in this world. He's gotten pretty good at fighting with practice. Honed his skills, identified weak spots in his enemy, and picked his targets. Many have tried to stand up to him only to find they fail miserably, every time. He's so great an opponent for us that failure is typical. We can't underestimate the champion of evil. There must be a hopeless feeling that we'll never win a battle against him.

Today marks the first Sunday in a six week series leading us through the season of Lent. Every Sunday we'll have an opportunity to look at the war that is being waged in our world. Not wars that we can see or influence with surges of troops. This morning we go to the first battle recorded in the gospel and see...

Its spiritual warfare out there
Jesus charges into battle
Jesus defeats our enemy

I'm always amazed at the numbers of people who volunteer for military service. It takes a special person to say they'll put their life on the line to stand up for what they believe in dearly. Jesus was a volunteer. **"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil."** Jesus willingly charged into this battle, spending forty days and nights alone in the desert without eating. He was weak and alone and trapped with nowhere to hide. He had become the perfect target for Satan.

The first shot came from Satan. **"If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."** If? Satan knew who Jesus was. That's why he was tempting him and not someone else. Really Satan was trying to butter Jesus up. "If you're the Son of God you shouldn't have to live this way. Why should you be hungry? Use your power and make some bread." Jesus fought back with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Satan was foolish. All the bread in the world wouldn't be worth anything if God didn't want Jesus alive. God kept people alive alone.

The battle continued this time with Satan going the other direction completely. Jesus trusted God the Father. Fine. Satan challenged him to show that trust. **"If you are the Son of God throw yourself down."** Satan even quoted a promise from the Bible that seemed to work. Jesus should go for it and see how far his trust of God would get him. Test out that trust by leaping and seeing how God rescues him with angels. Jesus again fought back with the sword of the Spirit. Putting the Lord to the test isn't trust.

The battle continued and Satan didn't hold back. He came out as the formidable opponent we know him to be. Satan attacked boldly and with power. His claim was that he holds so much power that he approaches god-like status. **"All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me."** Satan would give Jesus the way out. Escape what they both knew was coming. Escape and take the easy way to glory without having to earn it on the cross. Just one little bow in worship. Jesus swings the sword of the Spirit. Satan is a liar. Worshiping Satan wouldn't get Jesus power or glory. It would make him servant of Satan. Humans are called to be servants of the Lord and worship him alone.

I know your life seems like a battlefield, and truthfully it is. There's a war going on and it's for your heart. It's a battle against, not just a frightening opponent, but an opponent who is undefeated against human beings. You've gone into battle trying to hold off Satan's attacks. But weakness and the war were too much. Satan butters you up saying its okay, you're in love. It's alright then to move in together before marriage and even go further physically. Satan alters his attack and tells you that being grouchy and short with people is acceptable because it's how you feel, you can't control it. Instead of tempting us Satan encourages us to tempt God. He says to you "Go ahead strike a deal with God." So you might say, "God I'll come to church so many weeks in a row and then you'll owe me." Or Satan has us asking when the worst happens to us why it didn't happen to someone else instead, someone more wicked. Every day you and I charge into battle against Satan and get whipped alone. We're hopeless in this battle. Nothing within us will change the outcome. Satan seems like the undefeated champion.

Jesus was protecting an undefeated record out there too. He went charging into the warfare with Satan without using one divine power for his own benefit. He could've zapped Satan into next week with a snap of his fingers. But he went into battle with the very powerful weapon you and I also have at our disposal but have failed so many times to use. Jesus swings the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God back and forth and it does its damage. **"It is written, Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."** So deep was Jesus' trust of God. **"It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test."** Jesus was perfect in not abusing his trust of God to test him. **"For it is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."** Jesus perfectly avoided the temptation to evade the cross and gain glory the easy way. Jesus was a perfect three for three. By words and actions Jesus showed his absolute power over Satan and sin. He wielded the Word of God like a Champion that sent Satan bruised, battered, and bloodied off the field of battle. No greater sight than for us to see our Champion on the field of battle having conquered our enemy.

This never was a war Jesus intended on losing. It was war though, the temptations were real. He knew temptation just like you do but never fell into sin. His purpose out there in the desert was to face the Tempter, the undefeated champion of lies and deceit. Satan had tricked the first Adam so easily in the Garden of Eden. Satan figured this Second Adam would have a weakness somewhere he could exploit. But with excellent precision Jesus fought off every attack. And after the temptations had gone far enough Jesus showed how in control he still was. **“Away from me, Satan!”** Not just “get away this is over”. But get in line behind me where you belong. Jesus was now judging Satan the loser. It was over. Satan was defeated! More defeats would come until the all crushing blow was struck as Jesus died on the cross. Jesus’ resistance and refusal to bend to one temptation of Satan allowed him to make the ultimate payment for our sins.

Even after hundreds of battles fought and lost our confidence is in our Champion. In Christ, hell and sin and death have all been defeated. Satan doesn’t hold any power over us anymore. He must give up the attack the moment we remind him of his defeat. When we stay close to the Word and Sacraments we’re reminding ourselves and Satan of his defeat at the hands of our Champion Christ Jesus. One little word is all it takes to fell him. God gives us that Word of God with his power to fight off Satan. Because Jesus our Champion walked off the battlefield victorious we too will walk off the battlefield of our lives victorious. Satan can never harm us. Our Champion defeated him for us.

This isn’t a pretend war going on. This isn’t drills or war games. It’s been fought since the beginning. And we’d be losing if it were up to us. But it’s not. There’s spiritual warfare going on out there. Jesus charges into the battle ready to fight on our behalf. And Jesus declares victory and our enemy defeated. The battle is over. The enemy has lost. Jesus is our Champion!