

*“Fighting the Good Fight of Faith”**Pastor Randy Orndorff**We Never Fight the Good Fight Alone**May 26, 2019*

Key Text: II Kings 6:8-23

I. Introduction – Memorial Day Thanks!

There are many people down through the ages who have given their lives in battle fighting for something. Some were on the wrong side—fighting for men to have power, control, domination. Others on the right side, fighting for freedom, security, and human rights. Those battles rage on in many places in the world today. We may or may not like talking about war, battles, fighting, and striving. The reality is it is part of the fallen world we live in. There are some places in the world where people live in constant threat and tension. In our country we have been blessed to have relative peace, though terrorism, riots and shootings have entered our culture. And all too often. We have our basic freedoms to work, travel, vacation, and enjoy life because we have men and women who have served or serve in the military to guard our freedoms. Many have given their lives and on this Memorial Day we owe them a deep debt of gratitude. Thank you!

II. Reflection on Fighting the Good Fight

This month we have looked at how we fight the good fight of faith and to do so without giving up or losing hope.

We recalled the story of David taking on and defeating Goliath who basically made fun of God, the Israelite army, and this youthful boy carrying a sling shot.

We recalled Paul saying to young Timothy to keep fanning into flame the gift of God which he received when Paul laid hands on him. And then Paul saying towards the end of his earthly journey, “I have fought the good fight, kept the faith and finished the course.”

You may recall last week two of our youth, Toni and Kirsten talked about how their faith was nurtured and increased because of you, their church family, and that, though you can't win every battle, we are all still more than conquerors because we have Christ who is for us. We are never alone and nothing or no one will be able to separate us from Christ's love.

III. Elisha's Story

And the Bible is full of such stories and encouraging words for those who believe in Christ. One particular story comes from II Kings and is about a prophet named Elisha and his servant. Elisha actually followed a very popular and effective prophet named Elijah. At least popular in his country's eyes. Not so much so for the 850 prophets of Baal and Bethsheba who hated him! Elijah focused on confronting, exposing idolatry and creating space for people to worship freely.

Elisha, a student of Elijah, then took the reigns and served more to demonstrate God's powerful, yet caring nature to all who came to him for help.

Such as Elisha tells a man named Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, who had leprosy, to dip himself in the Jordan river seven times. Reluctantly he did, and he was healed. He tried to give Elisha a gift and Elisha would not accept it. Naaman recognized there is no other God but the God of Israel.

Later Elisha is with a team of young prophets cutting down trees along the Jordan river to build a home. An ax head falls off the handle into the river and the user says, “It was borrowed!” Elisha cuts a stick, throws it in the water and the iron ax head floats. This likely showed the younger prophets that Elisha was Elijah’s chosen successor. It could also suggest that when we have things in life that seem to be lost in the muddy waters, God can lift us up out of those situations. Notice the man said to Elisha, “It was borrowed.” Elisha performs this miracle giving him credibility and meeting a person’s need who likely didn’t have enough money to pay for the ax head that was lost.

IV. Elisha at Dothan

That takes us to today’s story involving the king of Aram and his army trying to raid Israel’s territory. The enemy is constantly trying to raid and invade our territory.

The king was not happy that every time he and his army prepared to raid a place the king of Israel already had a guard there. The king of Aram initially thinks he has a mole in his army warning Israel’s king and they all deny it. They say it’s Elisha who hears every word you speak in your bedroom.

Was Elisha in the king’s bedroom? No—but God obviously spoke to Elisha in his quiet time so that Elisha could warn Israel’s king who could then send soldiers to guard the towns and villages the king of Aram wanted to raid. And it frustrated him. So he inquired as to the whereabouts of Elisha. Elisha was in Dothan, so he sent horses, chariots, and a strong force to surround the city.

V. Early in the Morning—More Are For Us!

In the morning, when he awoke, Elisha’s servant looked up on the hills and was terrified. They were surrounded by the enemy and you can hear the terror in his voice, “O my Lord, what shall we do?” Fear overcame him.

Elisha quickly tells him not to be afraid. We likely need to hear that over and over in our own lives. “Do not be afraid.” What is the biggest fear you have right now? I can almost imagine that he was mortified!

And Elisha says, “There are more with us than there are with them.” And Elisha prays, “O Lord, open his eyes that he may see.” And guess what? God opens the servant’s eyes and he sees hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

I cannot say I completely understand how it works, but the Bible speaks numerous times about God fighting for us in the battles we face.

David and Paul both knew God was fighting for them. Moses was told in Exodus 14:14, “The Lord will fight for you, you only have to be silent.”

Later in Deuteronomy 3:22, “You shall not fear them, for it is the Lord your God who fights for you.”

Most of us know and have relied on Isaiah 40:31, “They who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not grow weary, walk and not faint.”

Paul says in Ephesians 6:13, “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, having done all, to stand firm.”

David, in a prayer found in Psalm 35:1, says, “Contend, Lord, with those who contend against me, fight against those who fight against me.” And we recall Zechariah’s words, “It’s not by might, not by power, but by my spirit says the Lord.”

VI. Questions Us Methodists Agree To

Do you recall the first two questions asked when you made your profession of faith to receive Christ and to join the church?

1. On behalf of the whole church, do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world and repent of your sin?
And we respond, “**I do**”.
2. Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever form it presents itself?

And we respond, “**I do**.”

VII. Five Ways to Help Fight the Good Fight of Faith

So, how can we actively fight the good fight of faith and allow God to fight or help us fight our battles? To face our giants? To face the army that has surrounded us and makes us feel defeated or at best hemmed in?

1. First off, as you did when you first made your profession of faith, keep looking to Jesus. Keep saying “Yes” to Jesus. Don’t look back though your past can teach you. Keep pressing on into the things of God.
2. The world lures us in with promises of love, acceptance, pleasures, wealth. We get lost when we pursue things of the world and not the things of God. Pray for God’s will to be done in your life and for God to open your eyes so you, too, can see the bigger picture, instead of what’s just on the surface. Do you know how much of an iceberg you can see? About 10%. It’s the 90% you can’t see that will cause you problems. Ask God to help you love God’s ways more than the world’s ways.
3. Resist evil and injustice, yes! Be careful not to resist God’s spirit because God promises to always lead and guide you.
4. When you face a storm or a trail or an unexpected or unexplainable difficulty, don’t run. Over and over we hear the words, “Don’t be afraid!” It’s mentioned in today’s lesson. Instead remember Isaiah’s words:
“When you pass through the waters, I’ll be with you; through the river, through the fire—you will not be swept away or burned.”

Going through difficulties can help you grow stronger in your faith. Trails cause us to grow bitter or better. No, it's not fun, but God often uses pain to help us grow or else we'd never change. Through pain we develop a hunger to change. We can't continue "playing church". Pain serves to help us take an honest look at life and to look deeper within ourselves and that can be uncomfortable and painful. However, people have started a new journey in their Christian life after their spouse said they refused to go on with this way of life, or after finding themselves in the grip of addiction or moral failure.

Or often when there is little other choice. When we lost Kelsey 10 years ago it was the most painful thing we ever experienced. It caused us to look deep inside—to the 90% of the iceberg we were not paying attention to and as we looked deeper into our hearts we found God had not abandoned us but was with us in the storm. We knew we needed faith and church and support of friends and counselors. We chose not to run from God, but to God.

5. Always be seeking to grow in your spiritual life. Be taking time everyday to read God's Word. Read the stories. See how much they relate to real life. Find times for solitude, rest, to be with God and to listen to God. The servant had to have his eyes opened to a bigger spiritual picture and so must we. But, sometimes we choose not to and we miss out on what God has for us and wants to do for us and through us.

Mother Teresa puts it like this:

"In the silence of the heart, God speaks. God is a friend of silence—we need to listen to God because it's not what we say, but what God says to us and through us that matters. Prayer feeds the soul—as blood is to the body, prayer is to the soul. It also gives you a clean and pure heart. A clean and pure heart can see God, can speak to God, and can see the love of God in others."

It rolls back around to Psalm 42:10, "Be still and know that I am God."

What is the one thing that blocks us from truly experiencing God in our lives?

Busyness—the hustle and bustle of life.

VIII. Shall We Kill Them?

Let's wrap up our story of Elisha, his servant, and the king of Aram's army. You might think this army of the Lord would just engulf them and destroy this enemy army. Not the case.

Elisha, remember, shows God's power in compassionate ways. He asks God to strike them blind and God does. Then it is Elisha who tells them, "You're in the wrong place. He invites them—remember they are in some way blinded—to follow him to Samaria. He then prays their eyes too will be opened and they realize they are now surrounded by the army of the king of Israel who asks, "Shall I kill them? Shall I kill them? What do you think he wanted to do? Kill them! But Elisha says, "Will you kill men who are captured?"

Instead give them food and water and send them home. Wonder how this story impacted the early church or should impact us today?

Paul said in Romans 12:19-20, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him, if thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” This is a hard saying, but forgiveness is the way of the Christian’s life.

The result? The bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel’s territory. The Israelites found themselves living in a season of peace because they let God help them fight their battle.

IX. Always Be Ready for the Battle

Did the battle come back again one day? Yes, it did, and the truth is, as we journey through life, as we run our race, we need to always remember we are never alone. Jesus’ final words, “Lo, I am with you always!” John Wesley’s final words? “The best of all, God is with us.”

Friends, keep fighting the good fight of faith and as John Wesley’s good friend George Whitefield said, “Fight the good fight of faith and God will give you spiritual mercies.”

X. Closing Prayer

Let us Pray:

Loving God, if we are honest, fighting the good fight of faith is not so easy. We don’t always understand why we have to face challenges, difficulties, giants, or enemy armies. They do seem to call us to place our trust, our hope and our faith in You. Give us ears to hear, eyes to see, hands that are willing, mouths that speak truth, and hearts to show forth love for You, our neighbors and yes, even as it was for Elisha on that day in Samaria, for our enemies. And thanks for the freedom we have in Jesus Christ to do so.

In Jesus’ Name,

Amen.