

She loved her daughter. More than her own life, she loved her daughter. Or thought she did. But on that night, weary, exhausted, the demanding cries of her daughter turned love into hate. For a moment. Once, twice, she struck her precious child. Hit her, harmed her. I don't know what came over me, she later said, I can't believe I did that.

When he made the promise he meant every word. I will be faithful to you until death parts us. But first in thought, then later in word, finally in deed he had broken that highest promise that one human being can make to another. He had been unfaithful to his wife; It was a detour he had never intended to take, but somehow it had happened.

As a child his dreams had been to serve, to lead his country toward a more glorious future. His whole life he dedicated to serving in ever greater ways. But somewhere along the line idealism leaked out and greed seeped in to take its place. And the one who ~~was~~ had devoted himself to the good of the country filled his pockets at the expense of the country.

I've told you three stories that have never happened, yet that happen every day. Paul said it this way: For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. I could take a survey: How many of you want to sin this week? How many of you intend to hurt the people who are nearest and dearest to you? How many of you what to cheat your boss? How many of you want to speak unkind words about your neighbors this week? OR WITHHOLD your help from those in real need? There are no hands up!

But next week <sup>we</sup> ~~you~~ will be down on ~~your~~ knees saying <sup>we</sup> ~~you~~ did those very things. That <sup>I</sup> ~~you~~ walked by the man in need. That <sup>I</sup> ~~you~~ <sup>was</sup> ~~was~~ too selfish to offer <sup>my</sup> ~~your~~ attention to the one who needed <sup>my</sup> ~~your~~ listening ear. Next week some of ~~you~~ us may look back in horror at how we cheated on ~~themselves~~ the one to whom we had promised our faithfulness. We may be the ones who will confess battering and bruising a child entrusted to our care by God. Today the good looks so attainable, easily grasped, easily done. But looking at the week from the other side we continually confess: For I did not do the good I wanted,

but the evil I did not want is what I did.

From  
in the letter to the Ephesians we hear these words: For we are not contend-  
ing against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers,  
against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts  
of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Now I must admit that kind of talk is out of fashion with me. I like  
to think that I am the biggest and most powerful one in my whole world. If I  
sin, I do not search for some cosmic power that controlled my action, I need  
look no further than my own heart to find the source of the temptation. As  
Jesus said in our gospel for today, it is now what is outside a man that defiles  
him, but what comes from within, out of the heart. Out of the heart come  
evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness,  
deceit, envy, slander, pride. I can do all of those all by myself. I need no  
assistance from the principalities, or powers or spiritual hosts of wickedness  
in the heavenly places.

And so when sin rears its ugly head, when temptation comes stalking me,  
I have that most American of ways of dealing with them. I try harder. In that  
I am like most of you. And next week, when we are all ~~down~~ down on our knees  
with plenty of sins to confess, it will be apparent just how effect our trying  
harder has been.

For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the spiri-  
tual principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present  
darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Trying harder will not win the battle. Doing your best will still leave  
you lost. For the <sup>war</sup> battle that is being fought is bigger than you and me. I.  
God sent his son Jesus Christ, gave his Son Jesus Christ because it is not  
within the power of human beings to ~~save themselves~~ guard themselves,  
to save themselves, ~~that~~ to be strong in themselves. God has given Christ  
as our protector, Christ as our Savior, Christ as our strength. He, and only

he can defeat sin and death and the power of the devil in your life and mine.

Therefore Paul tells us: Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his  
might. Not our might, but his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that  
you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Not my armor, my  
goodness, but the armor of God. For <sup>we</sup> you are not contending against flesh and  
blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world  
rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in  
the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be  
able to ~~stand~~ withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand  
therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breast-  
plate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the <sup>the equipment of</sup> gospel of peace;  
besides all these, taking the shield of faith with which you can quench all  
the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the  
sword of the spirit which is the word of God.

Dress yourselves, arm yourselves, with what God provides. Truth,  
righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, let  
these be your security, your hope, your defense. Not your wealth or your  
works or your competence, but Christ. Only he is sufficient for the battle  
you face.

This being dressed in Christ is not like a pill we can take, some clothes  
quickly thrown on. Rather in worship, in prayer, in the word and the sacraments  
we are continually being dressed in the armor of God. When the evil day comes,  
without this armor we are overwhelmed. And that day does come to us all in  
sickness, and suffering and loss. I want each of you to be so clothed in  
truth and righteousness and faith and salvation and the gospel and the  
word of God that you will stand in that day.

Finally I close this sermon with Paul's closing words to the Ephesians:  
Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that  
end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,  
and also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth to boldly  
proclaim the mystery of the gospel, that I may declare it boldly as I ought  
to speak. Amen.