

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

Rev. Dr. John V. Callahan Jr.

Sermon Text: Ephesians 6:10-13 and Isaiah 9:1-7

Sermon Title: "Fighting in the Might of God" (*It's A Wonderful Life* series - First Sunday of Advent)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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It's a Wonderful Life is one of those Christmas movies that my family and I watch every year. Right after the Christmas Eve service, we get on pajamas, get out the pillows and blankets, and pop in the movie until it is time to go to sleep. If you have never seen the movie, it's about a man who is about to take his life. He is fed up with all the failures he has had to endure, and now he wants to jump off a bridge and drown himself in the freezing waters below. A group of angels in heaven convene a meeting, and they decide to send Clarence, a guardian angel Second Class who hasn't earned his wings, to try and convince George Bailey not to kill himself. Sorry to share any spoilers, but Clarence the guardian angel is successful in saving George, and he also earns his wings in the process.

But before George and Clarence meet, the movie tells the story of George Bailey from childhood to adulthood. The movie covers some key moments in George's life that will make him into the man he never

planned to be, but *the* man who makes a huge difference in his community of Bedford Falls.

When George is ready to head off to college, his father dies from a stroke. His father owned the Bailey Building and Loan Association, a company that lends money at a fair rate to people who hope to buy homes. Much of the working poor are able to claim property for themselves, which makes them want to work harder. The old Building and Loan is somewhat successful, but not as successful as Henry F. Potter's lending businesses.¹ Potter is a slum lord and profiteer, and he wants to sink the Bailey Building and Loan, so he may be the only person that lends money to people at exorbitant rates.

With George Bailey's father dead, Henry Potter is now in the position to take over. The board of directors will do whatever Potter wants them to do, but before this can happen, they ask George to take over where his father left off. They want George to head the Bailey Building and Loan. George argues and complains, saying that he is going to college. He is going to travel the world. He is going to build things and make something of himself. The board says that if he leaves, they will have to sell the Building and Loan to Potter, and they could only imagine what would

¹ Henry Potter has nothing to do with Harry Potter, but if he did he would be Harry's evil magical uncle (to be sure).

happen next. George ditches his plans and takes over, much to Potter's displeasure.

And for much of the movie, we see how George fights Potter. He fights the old slum lord and profiteer by buying large acres of property and selling plots of land to the working poor at a reasonable price. He fights Potter by convincing people not to go to Potter to receive any of his loans, which they could barely pay off, but to ask George himself to lend money, which they would easily pay off. Even when Potter tries to hire George for his business, offering him a \$20,000 per year salary (consider this: the average household at the time the movie was made was about \$3000, so receiving \$20,000 would be like working nearly 7 years in one year), plus George would have the chance to make business trips to Europe.² If George accepts the deal, he would truly be a rich man. But he fights Potter once more, throwing the offer back in his face, realizing that all Potter wants to do is kill the Bailey Building and Loan and take full control of the town of Bedford Falls.³

We turn to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and we realize that we are always fighting against something. As children of God and disciples of Christ, we stand

² www2.census.gov/prod2/popscan/p60-001.pdf.

³ [En.wikipedia.org/wiki/It's_a_Wonderul_Life](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It's_a_Wonderul_Life).

strong in the power of the Lord, and we stand toe-to-toe with all things that would want to overpower God's might. Paul tells us that we do not fight against flesh and blood; in other words, people. In fact, all people, whether they know it or not, stand together, fighting against that which tries to knock us down and knock us away from God. No, we fight the evil devices of the devil, Paul says.⁴ Every one of us has to deal with sin on various levels. My sin may not be your sin, but it is sin nonetheless. It attacks our faith. It makes us doubt God's power with quite convincing arguments. It causes some to walk away from God altogether.

Paul describes the evil devices of the devil working through principalities, powers, and rulers of darkness. We might call it corporate greed, but the spiritual reality is the devil using people to place money over relationships. We might call it corruption, but the spiritual reality is the devil using people to use power to take advantage over others. We might call it social injustice, but the spiritual reality is the devil using people to make others feel inferior and less like children of God. People and governments and corporations are used against God, in order to bring down God's people.

Paul says we need to stand against it all. We do

⁴ Ephesians 6:11.

not stand alone, for when we stand it is in the power of the Lord. It is with the armor of God that we may be able to stand against all that the devil may throw at us. To stand means to be defiant, immovable, unshakable. We can do this only because God through Christ and the Holy Spirit makes us able to stand.

George Bailey was one of those who had to stand. He didn't want to – he was ready to leave his hometown behind and go off to do his own thing – but the moment came for him to stand against the evil that could overtake all the people he knew. It wasn't so much that Henry F. Potter was evil incarnate. The evil fed into Potter. The evil had the ability to use one person to take one town apart. The evil convinced Potter that he was better than everyone else, that he was the only person anybody could rely on, that he was their true leader and their true god. He would be the only source of food and money and comfort and entertainment, not any body else. Certainly, not God. This was the reality that George Bailey fought against. He fought against the devices of evil that would tear families and community apart, even tear him and his family apart eventually, so that there would be nothing left. With great courage and foresight, George Bailey stood.

We turn to Isaiah 9. Gloom has occupied the land for far too long. The lands of Zebulun and Naphtali have suffered much. Zebulun and Naphtali were the first tribes to feel the brunt of the Assyrian invasion, the first people of Israel to be spirited away to foreign lands.⁵ Many others have dwelled in darkness, according to Isaiah, due to the evil devices of the devil. Where there is no light, there is no hope.

But now a Light is coming. The people can see it shining. The Light will bring great delight to the people, because the Light will break the oppressive yoke of sin. The Light will shine in the darkness, exposing the evil devices of the devil. The darkness will not be able to overtake the Light, for it will have no power to do so.⁶ If evil has no power to overtake the Light, evil has no power to overtake us. We are able to stand.

We normally do not see the Christ Child as a warrior. We like to think of Jesus as small and innocent, depending on earthly parents to feed him, clothe him, and raise him. We don't like to think of Jesus as anything other than that. But Isaiah paints a different picture for us. Isaiah's illustration of Jesus fit perfectly with the Christmas story. For you see,

⁵ Thomas Nelson Publishers, *The Nelson Study Bible (NKJV)*, cf. 1127.

⁶ Cf. John 1:5.

even at his birth Jesus was not innocent, innocent as defined as helpless, weak, powerless. Jesus as the newborn Babe was very much powerful, more so than the angels who visited the shepherds, more so than the wise men who traveled a long distance to enter the barn.

As Isaiah says, a Child is born unto us, a Son is given, *and the government shall be on his shoulders.*⁷ Anyone who has the government on his or her shoulders cannot be weak and powerless. Jesus is God in the flesh. Even at his birth, Jesus comes in the might of the living God. Part of his name is Mighty God and Everlasting Father. Jesus comes to stand against the evil that we face every day, that evil who uses every device to take us down. Jesus doesn't wear the armor of God like we do – he is the Armor of God, the Shield, the Sword, the Defense, the Offense.

Jesus is born in order to reclaim the order of this world. The government, the economy, the environment, every principality and power has been abused by the devil. All the spiritual hosts have suffered due to sin, separating them from the might and grace of God. Gloom and darkness is the weapon of evil to infect everything, and Jesus is born unto us, and he shouts, “No more!” The government shall fall

⁷ Isaiah 9:6, emphasis mine.

no more. The environment shall fall no more. Relationships and sense of worth and desire for compassion shall fall no more. Jesus is born to stand against the same evil we stand against. Jesus is born in the might of the Lord to take on the government – the operations of humanity and creation – placing them squarely on his shoulders, and to bring us and creation into the brilliantly warm Light.

We turn to Colossians 1, a passage we didn't read today but one that still fits with our Christmas story. Paul is speaking about the preeminence of Christ, the superiority, the dominance of Christ. Paul says that Christ is the firstborn of all creation, meaning that Christ was before all of creation could be. Christ was with God the Father and the Holy Spirit before Big Bangs or whatever happened to begin the process of creation. But more than that, Paul tells us that all things were created by Christ. "Things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through [Christ] and for [Christ]."⁸ The principalities and powers that Paul mentions in Ephesians 6 were not created by the devil. Spiritual realms and authority were not created *for* the devil. If anything is to come into existence in

⁸ Colossians 1:16.

this world, it has to go through Jesus. If a throne or principality or authority is created, it had to have been created in Christ first. If we were to be born, the first moments of life were given to us by Jesus himself.

So the Babe in Bethlehem is born to take back what was already his to begin with. The mighty Child is just reclaiming what was rightful his from the start. This world was not created for the devil, and this world was not fashioned for gloom and darkness. Creation came to be through Christ and for Christ, and so the mighty Child comes to us to take back his world. He wrestles power from the devil, and places back on his shoulders the government of the world, which was there from the start. Jesus allows everything to exist to the glory of God, just as all things were created in the first place.

Jesus is born unto us, born to eliminate the evil that means to drag us down. The George Baileys of the world can stand against the Henry F. Potters, because of the Light that shines around them. We may stand against anything that evil throws at us, for we are children of the Light. When all is said and done, we shall remain standing in glory and in light.

Assurance of Pardon:

Hear the Good News: what we deserve to have, Jesus has carried for us: sin and destruction and death. Jesus is the source of eternal life, and we can have such life if we accept him and believe. Believe this good news, brothers and sisters: In Jesus Christ you and I are forgiven! Thanks be to God! Amen.