

Matthew 4:1-11

In the days when cities were protected by walls, it was common for the enemy to begin their attack by making a breach in the wall. Quite often this was done by tunneling under the wall, and then rigging explosives to collapse the wall in that place, or putting lit timber there which would burn a hole in the wall. Once the wall was breached, the enemy troops would be able to swarm into the city and take it.

Therefore, when the wall was breached, armed soldiers from within the city were called upon to stand in the breach. They would form a line of defense outside the city wall so the wall could be rebuilt behind them. This, almost always, meant certain death for those who stood in the breach. These soldiers now became the target of the enemy. Rather than attacking the city itself at this point, the enemy turned its attack to those who stood in the breach.

My friends, our wall was breached in the Garden of Eden. The Serpent, our deadly enemy, tunneled into God's perfect paradise and collapsed the wall by tempting Adam and Eve to fall into sin. When they fell, Satan was able to take the city, and he could not be stopped. He, with his swarm of demons, claimed our earthly city with all of its inhabitants.

Once a beautiful city, it became an ugly wilderness. Satan brought sin, sickness, violence, and death into our city; into our hearts and lives. No place and no one was safe. Uncleaness was everywhere. Lies, gossip, hatred, sexual perversion...everything vile and wicked found a home in that city which God had created holy and beautiful.

But God did not turn His back on our city. He promised to send One who would stand in the breach. And so Jesus came. He came to our city, now a wilderness, and He went out into that breach arming Himself with the sword of God's Word. Our enemy turned his focus toward Him. He came to Jesus as He stood in the breach. In the wilderness, Satan attacked our Lord. Jesus was all alone. He went out into the wilderness, to face Satan's temptations, hungry, weak, with no one by His side. It meant certain death for our Champion. He went to stand in the breach knowing what it would cost Him. But He went joyfully, willingly to defend us from our mortal enemy.

No one else could stand up to the deadly Serpent. Only the Son of God could stand against him. And He held him off. He parried Satan's attacks with the Word of God. Three times the devil came against Jesus, and each time our Lord held His ground. But in doing so; in defending us against our enemy - there in the wilderness, all the way to the barrenness of Golgotha's cross - Jesus received a wound which cost Him His life. Satan attacked Him with whips and rods, with nails and thorns, with the accusing Law of God. The blood flowed out of our Champion. He bowed His head and He died. But, my friends, He finished His task. Jesus held off the enemy, and with His own precious blood, He filled in the breach in the wall. You are safe within those holy wounds of our Lord.

But what about, we may wonder, all those demons who were already in the city? Even Satan himself found a way in prior to the coming of our Champion. Remember your Baptism. When you were brought to Holy Baptism, Satan was rebuked, and he, with his swarm of demons, was

driven out of your heart. And Jesus came into your heart and life through those same waters which expelled the devil; and your Lord now stands guard over you.

What comfort this is for us! How we need this, because you and I do such a poor job of standing guard over ourselves. We do not rise up to defend ourselves against the enemy very well. We sleep when we should be on watch. We do not take up the sword of the Word, but we lay it aside, barely hearing it, barely studying it.

And so what happens is quite predictable. When an enemy sees his opponent asleep on his watch, and not well-armed, he attacks knowing that he will easily breach the wall and take the city. Even if he was once driven out, he does not give up; not when he sees an opening through which he can enter in.

Every temptation that comes against you is Satan attempting to re-breach your wall. And you know, as well as I...or maybe, in fact, we don't...how often he is successful against us. It's the Garden of Eden all over again. The Serpent seduces us. He disarms us, moving us farther and farther away from our only weapon of defense - the Word of God. He leads us into misbelief. He makes us believe that we are safe with God, when actually we're not, for we stand far from Him. He tunnels quietly. He works diligently while we are asleep. And he collapses our wall again. And friends, if you don't think this can happen to you, it already has.

What are we to do? Our walls are re-breached again and again. We see the walls of our loved ones; we see breaches in their walls. Here's what we do. We ourselves stand in the breach for each other. We do this by praying for each other. Your pastor, and your fellow members here in your church family, stand in the breach of your wall by praying for you. You stand in the breach of my wall by praying for me. You and I stand in the breach of the walls of our loved ones as we bow our heads and pray for them.

And when we do this, we become the target of the enemy. Satan attacks us when we pray for each other, for our prayers put us in harm's way; they place us in the breach of the wall. But we do not stand alone in the breach. Jesus stands with us, for our prayers are joined to Him who prays fervently for you day and night.

Our prayers are not powerful. They are weak petitions and intercessions offered by sinful people. But the One who answers our prayers, and who prays with us, is powerful, and He is the One who forgives. We cannot overcome the enemy for ourselves or for each other. But Jesus does. As we stand in the breach for each other, we arm ourselves with God's Word in our heart, with the water of Baptism on our head, and with our prayers in Jesus' name upon our lips. The enemy cannot defeat one who is armed in this way.

We cover each other with the blood of Christ as we pray for each other. The swarms of demons are driven out by Jesus' blood - that same blood by which you are forgiven of your sins. But because the demons return day after day, and they attack with their temptations again and again, you and I are called upon to stand in the breach for each other until our days here are over.

Do not be afraid. You are not alone in the breach. Your Champion stands with you, and He will never leave your side. Amen.