

Ephesians 6:10-20

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Today, we turn to St. Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with

which you can extinguish 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, praying 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 words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”

We are, many of us, familiar with this text. It is a very powerful and imaginative metaphor that Paul uses for us in our text today. There are many pastors who could spend weeks delving into the intricacies of this text, exploring the symbolism of each piece of armor having a particular function. Indeed, there are some who have. Many would point out that this is a description of the armor worn by a Roman soldier and how that

connects to the life of Paul and his imprisonment with the writing of this letter. But that isn't what is most appealing about this text. It is appealing because it makes us heroes. We get to put on this incredible, holy armor and prepare ourselves to do battle against the forces of darkness.

What could be more exciting than the prospect of being drafted into the army of God? We wield weapons like the sword of the Spirit, wearing the helmet of salvation and the breastplate of righteousness. We can stand in a line together, holding the shield of faith, protecting the person beside us as well as ourselves. Together, we can face anything! Together we will have victory! God wills it!

Yes, this is all very exciting. But we didn't read the verses prior to this, did we? In fact, the verses leading up to this seem to be conspicuously absent from our lectionary. In these verses, Paul says, "Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear

and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.” Oh. Ummm. That’s not, that’s not what we want to hear, is it? This is the politically incorrect stuff that we don’t talk about. We can’t defend this kind of stuff in Scripture today, so why are you bringing it up here, Pastor?

I bring this up because it helps to remind us how we are to read Paul’s words in our text today. Paul is not calling us Christians to battle. He isn’t telling us that we will be armed with these weapons of God, because our enemies are not flesh

and blood. The Gospel will never prevail if it is spread on an ocean of blood shed by our hands.

But this doesn't stop us from wanting to measure the worth or success of the Church or Christianity in human terms. We want to be able to measure this stuff. How many people have you shut down for their attacks against Christianity this week on Facebook? You need to get out there and fight the good fight. How many people are in church? If your congregation isn't growing, it's dying! How much are the offerings this Sunday? If we don't meet our budget, all will be lost! Has this project been done this week? If it hasn't been completed, the people who are working on it are clearly faithless lollygaggers! Let's all get together to tell them so!

Indeed, this is a problem that even reaches outside of the Church into the way that we view our world. There are many of us who insist that every elected leader must profess to be a

Christian, regardless of what they actually say or do. We lament the current wave of secularism and the rise of people professing to have no faith whatsoever. We find ourselves in very uncertain and troubled times. The general tenor of our culture now is that if someone disagrees, they are the very epitome of evil. It is incredibly difficult to not get caught up in this and find a fight around every corner. And because we are Christians, we get to claim righteous cause and indignation, convincing ourselves that our belligerence is the holy and righteous thing to do because someone needs to stand up for Jesus and it's up to me to protect the faith!

But you see, when we take that kind of mindset, we are missing the point of Paul's writing entirely. Why does Paul tell us to put on this armor in the first place? He says, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." It isn't so that we can get out there and

kick butt better than ever before. It is God's protection of us. All of these things, truth, righteousness, peace, salvation, faith, the Word of God, all belong to him or begin in him. They are not ours to wield as we chose. They are the means by which our loving God protects us against the evils and attacks of Satan.

Believe me, I understand the disappointment of not being called here to become a great, holy warrior. It would be fantastic to do that. But the problem, as I said before, is that the kingdom of God is not advanced by blood being shed by our hands.

Rather, the kingdom of God is advanced by blood being shed from the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ for us. There is no need for us to go into battle against Satan and his forces because they have already been defeated.

Their defeat was secured almost two thousand years ago on a hill outside of Jerusalem. When our Lord Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross, that was the Son of God going to war. He did

not come covered in thick armor. He was not strapped in bandoliers and holsters. As he hung there dying, the battle was raging. Not a battle than could be seen by our eyes, but a battle for our very souls and eternity. Truly, by all of the standards and measures of our world, Jesus was a spectacular failure. As he was dying on a cross, the world surely shook its head noting that the time for Jesus to fight was over.

He should have organized his followers into ranks. He should have armed them. This man that was able to perform all kinds of miracles could have miraculously made his followers into perfect killing machines. He could have used his mastery over the created world to have the earth itself crack open and swallow his enemies. For someone capable of the healing miracles that Jesus performed, imagine how unstoppable an army backed up by Christ would be!

But he did none of that because he doesn't send his people to fight and die to spread his message or to secure any benefits. No, Jesus himself fought for you and for me. It was his blood that secured the benefits of life, salvation, and forgiveness for you and for me. It was the victory of Christ at the cross and the tomb that assures us that these things have been won.

It is Christ who is our quartermaster, providing us the things needed for our defense in this dark and broken world. Not because he calls us to war, but because he calls us to stand firm. We may be standing in defense, but it is Christ who is out ahead of us, engaging the enemy head on. And make no mistake, to simply stand firm in the face of an enemy is no small task. Each person in the shield line is responsible not only for himself, but also his neighbor. Each person must have the courage and strength of will to not run away from the coming onslaught.

We must never think that our enemy is something to not be taken seriously. Satan desires nothing more than to see the kingdom of God brought low and the people of Christ lost to the darkness. But we do stand together. We hold each other up. We encourage one another in our callings and vocations. We desire to be great warriors for Christ, but it is better for us to see the greatness of Christ as our warrior, who has saved us by defeating Satan at the cross.

The victory of Christ at the cross is real and it has an impact for us today. There is no need for us to go to battle because the enemy is defeated. Our job is to hold against the dying throes of the enemy as he fruitlessly lashes out until the day when Christ returns to secure Satan forever in the pit that has been prepared for him. Thanks be to God that we have no place in the pit because we have a place in the kingdom of God and are protected by our Lord. Amen.

Now, may the peace that surpasses all understanding keep
your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord to life
everlasting. Amen.