

9/5/21 15th Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor Priewe

Text: Ephesians 6:10-20

Theme: Strong in the Lord

There's a famous scene from the Academy award winning Best Picture, *Braveheart*. William Wallace, played by Mel Gibson, strides across the battlefield in front of his rag-tag army of men, martialled for battle. As his fellow Scotsmen are sizing up the enemy across the battlefield, they're considering their options, the best of which seems to be to high tail it out of there while they can still escape with their lives. Yet Wallace stands resolved before his men, courageous and ready for the fight. His men still wavering, Wallace pleads with them to think of all that will be lost if they simply run away without a fight. Soon their courage starts to swell. Wallace's brave heart has once again inspired them for the fight, and they charge the field to attack the enemy.

There's something about a speech that can rouse the spirit, that can rally the troops, that can fill a person with courage and resolve. Simple words, but spoken in a way that motivates, that bolsters, that inspires someone to carry out the call to action. Who of you didn't feel ready to charge the battlefield after we sang, "Onward Christian Soldiers".

Today the Apostle Paul lines us up on the battlefield and calls us into the fight of our lives. It's a battle that rages every day against our bodies and souls. Yet Paul doesn't stand before us with an Oscar winning speech. He stands before us with the very words of God— words that make us *Strong in the Lord*. 1) *Mentally Prepared for the Devil's attacks*. 2) *Physically equipped for the battle*. 3) *Courageous for the fight*.

The first thing Paul addresses is our mindset, our mental preparation, so that we don't just waltz out on the battlefield and realize, "Oh, I guess there's a battle today, I wonder who's fighting.". He wants to give us knowledge, the mental edge that will help us carry out a strategy for victory. He's giving us brains to go with the braun he's supplying us.

First and most important of all, Paul wants us to realize that we don't stand a chance in the fight if we fight with our own strength. Paul says, "**Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.**" It's even more powerful when we realize God isn't just telling us to lift weights and get stronger. The verb is actually passive, "Be strengthened in the Lord." God does the strengthening, and he is a mighty refuge for us in the battle. But if we leave him behind and run off on our own to test our own might in battle, we leave ourselves easy prey. You know what this looks like for me? It looks like those weeks where I look at my Bible reading plan and realize it's been a week since the last time I actually sat down to take his Word to heart. That's like running into battle blindfolded wondering when the devil is going to take my head off! But connecting to the word and taking it to heart helps us realize that the spiritual fight is both mental and physical

The Lord's mighty power alone makes us formidable, and so Paul calls us to "**Put on the full armor of God.**" (Ephesians 6:11) After we realize where our power comes from, that we are only *Strong in the Lord*, then Paul wants us to realize who our enemy is, "**so that we can take our stand against the devil's schemes.**" So what do we need to know about our enemy the devil to give us the edge in the fight? The devil is powerful, no doubt about it! He's one of the angels that God created, who rebelled against God, and was cast out of heaven. He's powerful and invisible on most occasions, like the angels, but here's the key point. The devil is not God.

Sometimes people think of God and the Devil as if they're equal adversaries, like the Yin and the Yang, or the Light Side and the Dark Side. No, the devil is not the opposing king in the chess game, he's a bishop or a rook that's gone rogue. He's only the prince of this dark world.

He's not omnipotent or all-powerful, he's not omniscient or all knowing, he doesn't know your thoughts like God does. His power has a limit. He's on God's leash, but he takes every inch of that leash roaming to and fro across the earth like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8).

The devil isn't like God, all powerful and all-knowing, but he is crafty! He masquerades like a fake psychic detective, making you think he can read your thoughts and see inside your mind. But what he really does is read your tells and watch your queues, waiting for his moment to strike and devour. He sets up traps specifically designed for you, traps that he's finetuned for centuries since the fall into sin, and on top of his well-practiced trickery, he's got help, legions of demons and evil angels at his disposal.

Paul says, **"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."** This verse has always confused me just a bit because the Bible talks about us struggling against our flesh all over the place. So why does he say that it's not against flesh and blood. What he's talking about is not our inner battle against our sinful flesh, which is definitely real. He's talking about flesh and blood, meaning other people. We're not struggling against people themselves, even evil ones, but against the legions of evil angels and demons who are working behind the scenes using their sin to wage war against the body of Christ. So those terms, "rulers," and "authorities" are not talking about earthly rulers, but about the ranks and rulers of the dark spiritual forces that stand against us.

I've understood this in a whole new way from C.S Lewis's book *The Screwtape Letters*. Lewis writes letters from the perspective of a demon named Screwtape, who is advising his nephew Wormwood on how to be a better tempter. In this dark world, Lewis imagines that the demons even attend school to learn new tricks like how and when to use sexual temptation and how and when to use isolation, or how to turn someone against God by using hardships and troubles. Your enemy the Devil and all his demons are wily foes, and we cannot afford to set foot on the battle unaware and unprepared. 1) So God mentally prepares us with knowledge, truth, and power for the attacks of the devil and all his evil angels. .

Next, he equips us with a holy suit of armor for the battle, so that we don't go running of into the battle unprotected and unarmed, **"Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."** (Ephesians 6:13). God is revealing a wonderful truth here, that we often forget when our pet sin comes knocking. We see a temptation that has caused us to sin so many times before and we act like we've got no chance, like it's already conquered us, and so we give in without even a fight. No, that's a bald-faced lie, and think of all that is lost if we simply lay down, curl up, and die on the field. The truth we need to remember is: God's strength and armor makes us able to stand against the devil's schemes.

Since he makes us able, so he calls us to do it! **"Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace."** (Ephesians 6:14,15). Paul is picturing the Roman soldier, part of an army that had conquered the known world of the time. The belt of truth binds up our clothes so we can move and guards our most vulnerable parts so that we can defend against the devil's lies. The breastplate of righteousness covers over our

heart and most critical organs from the most dangerous attacks. Having our feet fitted with the right footwear makes us mobile and agile, able to get where we need to be fast. These elements are the bare essentials of armor that protect our spiritual life with truth, righteousness, and peace.

He goes on, **“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”** The outside of the shield was coated in leather that they would soak before the battle so that when a flaming arrow hit it, it’d be immediately extinguished. Arrow after arrow and missile after missile the devil and his army shoots at us—when we’re tired, when we’re angry, when we’re frustrated, when we’re down and out. But, also, when we feel like we’re flying high and mighty, he knows just how to clip us and know us down. The shield of faith allows us to block all these unseen attacks.

The last of the defensive armor suit is the **helmet of salvation**. God gives us protection for our brain, our mind and the seat of our soul, the place where our faith resides. He gives us the assurance of salvation in our baptism that not even the devil himself can touch. God says, “You are mine,” “Your forehead bears my name!” And all the blows of the evil one cannot penetrate the helmet that God has given to protect our salvation.

Finally, after giving us 5 pieces of armor to defend ourselves, God gives us one powerful weapon to attack with for ourselves, **“the Sword of the Spirit.”** The Roman short sword is one of the most effective military weapons ever created for hand-to-hand combat. It wasn’t long and bulky like the giant swords in Braveheart, it was short and razor sharp on both sides. With it you could thrust and slash in every direction with compact decisive movements. And like it, the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, is able to attack the devil and all his demons in every direction and deliver to them a death blow. Scripture tells us elsewhere, **“Resist the devil and he will flee from you!” (James 4:7).**

So God has 1) mentally prepared us for the enemy, 2) he has physically equipped us with armor for the fight, and 3) finally all of this gives us courage for the fight. Knowing the enemy and his tricks makes us ready. The armor of God makes us able to both defend and attack. But there’s one truth about this armor we haven’t mentioned yet, perhaps the most important truth of all. It’s hand-me-down armor. Not bright and shiny and polished, no, it’s battle-tested and burnt. It’s worn and beaten, yet still firm and trusty. It was worn in the fiercest battle this world has ever known by the fiercest warrior who has even graced a battlefield.

Isaiah 59 tells us, **“The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm achieved salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.” (Isaiah 59: 15-17).** Translation: Your brother Jesus wore this armor when he came like a pent-up flood and destroyed the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. He single-handedly won the battle for our salvation, standing against every last arrow and missile the Devil could throw at him. He stood in your place for every time you’ve fallen on the field and now he gives his armor to you, to protect you strong in the faith until the day of life everlasting!

Being clothed on the full armor of God—that makes you **strong in the Lord**, prepared for the enemy, equipped for the battle, and courageous for the fight. Amen. Oh Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.