

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of August 30, 2009

Christ is Our Armour (Ephesians 6:10-20)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the:

“Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”

This is the text.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, we live in a peaceful country. Canada is full of beautiful nature and it is generally a very nice place to live. It's low key. We as Canadians don't generally make too many waves in the world. Other countries are not afraid of Canada. Our military has shrunk over the years and while it is true that we have very brave soldiers serving in places such as Afghanistan to defend our freedoms, by and large for most of us war is not something that we think about on a day-to-day basis. There is no immediate threat to our well being; while we do have our daily struggles in life there is no apparent or imminent attack on our country.

And yet, St. Paul in our text uses the image of a soldier getting ready for battle to describe our daily life as Christians. The picture here is a Roman soldier and the armour that a soldier would wear in Biblical times. There are some similarities to modern soldiers; modern soldiers and ancient soldiers both have helmets; they both have a sort of armour; and they both have weapons. Mind you the sword now takes the form of the machine gun and the metal breastplate now is a bullet proof vest. Paul uses this image of the soldier going to battle because we too are soldiers in a spiritual sense. We are fellow soldiers and we have Christ as our Commander in Chief.

Life is a battle of sorts isn't it. We have many struggles in this life. We have setbacks in our work; we have difficulties in our family; we have problems with money; and we experience sickness and the painful loss of loved ones. Indeed, life can hit hard and it can keep us down if we let it. But the Lord, He is our help in time of need. He gives us a hand; in Jesus we can find the strength we need to continue.

By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit St. Paul tells us, “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armour of God”. In other words, our strength is Christ Himself. He comes to us and gives Himself as our protection. When St. Paul says, “Put on the armour of God” he means to put on Christ; he means to remember that you have been Baptized into Christ and He is your Saviour. Jesus protects us like the armour protects the Roman soldier except the protection Jesus gives is complete and it is perfect.

But then we might ask, “What does He protect us from? If we have Christ as Saviour why do we still have problems in life?” Let's think of what a soldier goes through...The

enemy attacks the soldier. The soldier has armour to defend the attacks but the attacks still come. In the same way, the hardships of our life still come our way but Christ gives us strength to endure them. As St. Paul wrote to Timothy, a fellow believer and pastor, "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:3). And ultimately our Lord Jesus gives us final victory over these hardships through His redeeming work. When He returns He will put an end for good all the evils of the world.

Friends, our Lord does not leave us as orphans; we are not left alone to deal with not only the hardships of life, not to mention the daunting spiritual attacks and temptations of Satan and the evil spirits. No, God is with us all the way. And He gives protection in Jesus. He protects us from losing heart amidst our struggles. He protects us with the hope of the life we have in Christ and that nothing can separate us from His love.

The protection is Jesus Himself. He is invincible against every attack of Satan. In Him we put on the helmet of salvation; this is the good news of the eternal life that we have through Jesus Christ. The epistle reading says we put on the breastplate of righteousness. You put this on first when you were Baptized and came to faith. But we are not born with this righteousness. It does not come from us. Rather, we are born only with a sinful nature, a desire to sin without a righteousness in God's sight. Jesus is the only One who is righteous and the Good News is that He calls us righteous because He died for our sins. We wear Christ like a suit of armour against Satan. When we feel tempted to give in to temptation it is imperative to think of Jesus, that we think of His love. He died on the cross to deliver us not only from the guilt of sin but also from the power of sin. When we think of Jesus, especially when we feel weak we can be strengthened by His grace and His love. His love so emphatically displayed on the cross makes us want to love Him in return and it dissipates our love for sin.

With Jesus we put what Paul calls a "belt of truth". Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." He is the one way to the Father because He is the only Saviour who has atoned for sin.

In the movie, "A Few Good Men", perhaps some of you have seen it; there is a memorable scene where a cornel in the marines, played by Jack Nicholson is cross-examined by a persistent lawyer, played by Tom Cruise. Tom Cruise demands that the cornel answer his question. He says, "I want the truth!" and the Jack Nicholson fires back, "You can't handle the truth!"

The truth is, friends, that the devil, the unbelieving world, and our sinful flesh can't handle the truth. Sometimes we don't like to hear the truth either do we...It's not pleasant to have our sins pointed out. It's not always easy to hear that we should forgive that person who rubs us the wrong way. But Jesus Christ has said, "The truth will set you free" and when we come to Him in humble contrition He sets us free with the forgiveness of our sins. He brings us back to Calvary where He paid for our sins; He gives us a new start and gives strength to walk with Him in a new direction.

Our faith also acts as a shield. In ancient times, Roman soldiers used circular shields for protection in close combat situations and larger oblong shaped shields for long range

attacks when things like flaming arrows were shot at them. The soldiers used to soak their shields in water so that they could extinguish the flaming arrows.

Spiritual attacks are like fiery darts. They can pierce. Feelings of lust or anger can burn us up from the inside out. Feelings of abandonment can come our way, especially during our hard times. But faith acts as a shield. It helps to dissipate our desire to sin and it brings the comfort that no matter how difficult things may get we still have Jesus who has went through all the hard things of this life and much more, who carried the full weight of the world's sin. We have a Saviour that is full of mercy. He is faithful.

Along with the shield God gives us a holy weapon. The Sword of the Spirit as Paul puts it. It is sharper than any two edged sword. It is deadly to Satan but it is life for all who believe in Christ. In the Bible we find the power of salvation, we find the Good News of Jesus. And when tempted we have the example of Christ when He was in the desert forty days. He quoted Scripture and clung to God's Word. He said, "It is written..." and Satan left Him. Friends, the Word is living and active and it is a weapon that also protects if we use it.

Friends, as our Heavenly Father God clothes His children and He gives us the best clothes. He gives us His only begotten Son, Jesus the Christ. In Him we have all the protection and strength we need to fight the good fight of the faith. We are Christian soldiers going into battle and yet we have the assurance that our Commander in Chief and Saviour has already ensured victory. From His cross Jesus said, "It is finished" and Satan became a defeated foe.

As we head home from church today for another week let us stay alert and keep our eyes fixed on Him and His mission to bring lost souls home to His kingdom. For with Christ you have His mighty strength on your side. And though we are weak He is strong and His righteousness, His truth, His salvation protects and leads us in His way. May His armour be our strength and our comfort every hour and every minute of every day. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.