

August 29, 2021
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Ephesians 6:10-20

STRONG IN THE LORD, WEARING HIS WHILE ARMOR.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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

Our text for meditation today comes from the St Paul's epistle letter to the Ephesians, the 6th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

Every Sunday is Easter Sunday, for you know that Jesus, who was crucified, is risen from the grave. The strife is over, the battle done. He has declared victory over sin, death, and the devil. It is good to be reminded of this fact week to week because most times, it doesn't look like the strife is over, the battle done. That is why Paul is writing his letter, to remind you of that the battle is the Lord's.

Today is our 8th and final week of walking through Paul's letter to the Christians around Ephesus. His entire letter drips with baptismal doctrine and imagery from the very beginning where we heard him say that God:

"... has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing... ..he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ..." (Ephesians 1:3–5)

God didn't choose you because of you. He chose you ***in Christ***. God didn't look ***at your*** works and deeds – but He looked ***at Jesus'*** work of salvation on your behalf on the cross. He looked at the robe of Christ's righteousness in which you were clothed in baptismal waters... where you were sanctified, having been cleansed of the iniquity of your sin, by the washing of water with the word. (cf: Ephesians 5:26) ***In Christ***, you are holy and blameless in His sight. God calls you to walk in manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. (cf: Ephesians 4:1) Not because it earns you anything before God, but as you just sang in the sermon hymn, by grace you're saved, grace free and boundless. (cf: LSB 566, stz. 1)

Even though the victory has been won, this is not the time to let down your guard. You are not yet part of the ***Church Triumphant***, living with those saints who have gone to heaven. We are living in the ***End Times***. There are many misleading doctrines and teachings on the ***End Times***. Do not be deceived. Christ's Church has been in the ***End Times*** ever since Jesus' ascension back into heaven. When you look at your life and your circumstances you know that that there is a

battle raging. Every Christian experiences it, the tribulation of suffering, pain, and the testing of your faith. Each of these tribulations points to the future great tribulation at the very End.

While you certainly possess all of Christ's gifts won on your behalf on Calvary's cross, until Jesus folds you to His breast in heaven, you are still a part of the ***Church Militant***, the assembly of the true believers ***in Christ*** on earth awaiting His return. And while He has won the victory over the devil and all things evil, our Lord God, in His rich wisdom has chosen to allow the devil to continue to prowl around on earth and in the heavenly places like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (cf: 1 Peter 5:8) St Paul writes:

"¹² 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." (Ephesians 6:12)

Make no mistake. Your fellow human beings are not the enemy. The enemy is not the atheists, Muslims, conservatives, or the liberals. Your fellow human beings are merely ***victims*** and ***the tools*** of the enemy. He uses them as pawns to tempt and afflict your sinful flesh. The enemy is the devil and his spiritual forces of wickedness in the invisible places. He is a master of lies and deception going all the way back to the fall in the Garden of Eden. (cf: Genesis 3:1; 2 Corinthians 11:3)

The enemy knows who you are, dear Christian. In the waters of Baptism, you were marked with the sign of the cross as one redeemed by Christ the crucified and sealed with the Holy Spirit. (cf: Ephesians 1:13) It's a mark that is invisible to human eyes but visible to the devil. And that mark angers him because it reminds him of his defeat and crushed head at the foot of Jesus' cross. And nothing gives the devil more pleasure than use his every weapon of sickness, worry, and guilt in attempt to crush you and steal your faith. He wants you to believe that he is winning the war. He wants you to believe that there is no God, or if there is a God, certainly doesn't have time for a sinner like you.

You see him in our world today. Perhaps now more than ever, Christian families and friends are turning on one another and attacking one another, on the basis of whether they are conservative or liberal, over the number of genders and personal pronoun choices. Are they pro-life or pro-choice, pro-vax or anti-vax, open boarders or closed, open communion or closed, ordain women or not, who is the pastor to condemn what he says is sin, and the list goes on. The devil is always in the details. He's always trying to get a foothold.

We live in a time when some who call themselves Christians don't believe in the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. They say it's just basic instructions for moral direction. Nothing more. Others don't believe that the devil exists or the fact that there is a real place called hell. Some say that they're spiritual but not religious. And unfortunately, if they're not firmly grounded ***in Christ***, that spirit very may well be of the devil. They talk a lot about how Jesus will give you your best life now, but they conveniently leave out the fact that Jesus said:

"In the world you will have tribulation..." (John 16:33)

"... you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:22)

Scripture teaches that there is good and there is evil. There is a heaven and there is a hell. The devil is real, and he is powerful. So, St Paul gives you words of comfort in the face of this

spiritual battle. It is not fought with weapons of war but with weapons of the Holy Spirit. Paul says:

“... be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.” (Ephesians 6:10)

God always does all the work. In our text today, Paul is not calling you to pull yourself up by the bootstraps and seek some sort of super-human strength from inside yourself and lead the charge against the devil. No. He is reminding you again that you are **in Christ... in the Lord...** and your strength is found right where He promises. You are strong in the Lord in your Baptism. You are strong in the Lord in the hearing of His proclaimed Word. You are strong in the Lord in His body and blood, given and shed for you. Earlier in his letter St Paul spoke of

“... the immeasurable greatness of [God’s] power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might...” (Ephesians 1:19)

It is not your power, but it is God’s power. It is the Holy Spirit who strengthens the baptized believer. He alone:

“... is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think...”
(Ephesians 3:20)

Paul continues in our text saying:

“¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” (Ephesians 6:11)

Again, this is not something that you do – but is something that God has already done for all who are **in Christ**. All who are **in Christ** have been given every spiritual blessing – **including** the whole armor of God. In the original language this whole armor is the word **panoply**. It means “... literally, the full preparation of a foot soldier for offense or defense.” (ANLEX, 293) It is God’s armor given to you. As I just said, in Baptism, you have been clothed with Christ... clothed with His righteousness and the armor of God. (cf: Ephesians, Concordia Commentary, Winger, 701)

Paul tells us that the whole panoply of armor consists of six items:

First is the belt of truth. God’s Word is truth, and it alone can frustrate the devil’s lies.

Second is the breastplate of righteousness. To the soldier the breastplate is the bullet proof vest. In this case it’s the breastplate of Jesus’ righteousness in which you were clothed in Baptism for your protection and salvation.

Third, is shoes for your feet. For the soldier, studded boots protected the feet and allowed him to stand firm. In this case, Paul says the shoes are the Gospel of peace so that you can stand firm in the Gospel promise that Jesus has reconciled God and you. Christ Himself is your peace. (cf: Ephesians 2:14)

Fourth is the shield of faith. The shield is defensive and protects the whole body. You are safe **in Christ**, clinging to Him in faith in all circumstances.

Fifth is the helmet of salvation. The helmet protects the head. Wrap it in the salvation Christ has won for you. It’s already yours, in your possession.

Sixth is the sword of the Spirit. It is not a long sword, but a short knife used for close combat. The only offensive weapon that God puts into your hand is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. That’s all you have to defend yourselves – but it’s all you need. It’s exactly what Jesus defended Himself with against the devil in the wilderness. (cf: Matthew 4:1–11)

So here you are, attired in the whole panoply of God's armor, and what are you supposed to do? Stand firm! (cf: Ephesians 6:13) Stand firm and pray. (cf: Ephesians 6:18) Unlike the 6 items of protection, prayer is not part of the armor. Notice that Paul doesn't say to pray for God help in the battle but to pray concerning the saints. Pray for your brothers and sisters *in Christ*, that they too, would be strong in the Lord and cling to Christ for salvation.

Fellow redeemed. Every Sunday is Easter Sunday, for you know that Jesus, who was crucified, is risen from the grave. He has declared victory over sin, death, and the devil. Yet, on this side of heaven in the Church Militant, the devil continues to prowl around on earth and in the heavenly places like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour, afflicting all God's children with suffering, pain, and the testing of your faith.

St Paul is not calling you to go on the offensive. It is not given to you to defeat the devil. Christ has already accomplished that on the cross. While in this world you will still have tribulation, take heart, for Christ has overcome the world. (cf: John 16:33) Paul is calling you to stand firm in your God given armor and wait on Christ to deliver the final victory on the Last Day. To be sure, be on the lookout for the devil's schemes and lies and the false doctrine of those under the spell of the devil. It is only by God's truth, righteousness, Gospel peace, faith, salvation, and Word that the devil's attacks will be deterred. In his commentary on the book of Ephesians, Winger points out a final irony, saying:

"... these enemies who are not made of blood and flesh are defeated by the flesh and blood of the divine Man Jesus Christ, crucified and risen to unite all people in himself." (cf: Ephesians, Concordia Commentary, Winger, 734)

Dear baptized child of God, at the font your old Adam was drowned and the new was clothed with the blood bought armor of Christ's righteousness. Wear it well and stand firm. The battle is the Lord's. Christ has won the victory, but the devil still prowls. Therefore wear your God given armor, stand firm, that you may be able to withstand the evil of these dark and final days.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.