

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 5-6, 2021

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place, ¹⁵ and with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals. ¹⁶ At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. ¹⁷ Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray for me also, that when I open my mouth a message will be given to me that boldly reveals the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may speak about it boldly, as it is necessary for me to speak.

(Ephesians 6:10-20 EHV)

It's been an amazing journey, this 6 week tour of God's grace 24/7...and more. We began with the "and more" part of it toward the middle of July, reveling in the fact that God chose us to be his in Christ – adopted us as his sons and daughters before creation, before there was such a thing as 24/7, way back in eternity. And all through this letter to the Christians at Ephesus, Paul has opened to us the full parameters of God's 24/7 grace. From grace as God's power for salvation, God's unfathomable love for us in Christ - "**God, because he is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved!**" (2:4,5) To grace as God's power for the Christian life - "**Put on the new self, which has been created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness..**" (4:24)

Near the end of this grace-filled letter, Paul says, "**Be strong.**" And a part of us – the weary, fatigued part of us – says, "Be strong? I don't always feel strong, I'm not always up to the battle. Just look at the times I've failed to be strong and given in to temptation and sin and despair." How can I be strong? Do we pump iron, spiritually speaking? Get a bigger Bible? No. What the word actually means is "be strengthened." It does not say "make yourself strong," as though we can somehow make it happen, but he is talking about being strengthened by someone/something else. That perspective changes things a bit, doesn't it? And Paul makes it plain here: "**Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.**" (6:10)

Nice thought. Real spiritual sounding. Is it necessary to be strengthened by the Lord and his mighty power? You tell me. Consider your current struggles – conflicts at work, school, within family; all the various challenges you face; maybe even, despair, depression, hopelessness, helplessness, a feeling of being overwhelmed. Underneath it all, who's the real enemy? People, problems, processes?

***"our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."** (6:12) This is spiritual warfare. Our enemies are not people "out there." Our enemies are not even people we know, no matter how much in conflict with them we might be. Underneath what can be seen is the unseen – our real enemies are spiritual, especially the unholy trinity of Satan, the world, and our own sinful nature. Remember how Jesus said to Peter, "**Get behind me, Satan.**" Peter wasn't the enemy. Satan was.*

And if Satan and all the forces of evil and darkness and death are lined up against us, are you able to go it alone on your own strength/ability/endurance? We best not go into this fight armed with nothing more than good intentions and a Pollyanna attitude that everyone will fight nice and fair and no one will get hurt. This is Satan we're talking about. He fights dirty, he cheats, he's relentless. We need to be armed for the fight. We need to gear up with the right equipment. You don't attack a bumper crop of weeds with a squirt gun unless it's filled with weed poison, but then you've got even more problems – weed poison in a squirt gun? You don't attack computer problems with a sledgehammer. It might feel right for a moment, but what you really need is an IT guy, someone who understands computers – such as nearest 12 year old. You don't show up to play football with a hat, glove, baseball bat and flip flops. You need a helmet, pads, mouth-guard, cleats.

For this spiritual fight, for this battle literally for the soul, we need spiritual battle gear. We look to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. **GRACE SUPPLIES THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD.** Paul says ***“Take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day.”*** (6:13) “Put it on and leave it on. Keep using the full armor of God.” That takes effort - Bible study, worship, prayer. Again. Too often, people underestimate what it means to grow in faith and to become spiritually mature. We equate head knowledge – at least enough to get us through confirmation – with spiritual maturity. We may equate pew imprints – the number of times our backside makes an impression in a church pew – with spiritual maturity. But being in the Word is a constant, ongoing, never-ending endeavor. We can't let down our guard. Ever. We're at war. The stakes are high. It's winner take all.

Let's examine this armor of God supplied by God's 24/7 grace. Paul was well acquainted with the warrior-wear of the Roman soldier. He's in prison as he writes this letter. The pieces of armor are listed in the order that a Roman soldier would put them on. Five defensive items, and one offensive weapon.

- ***the belt of truth buckled around your waist*** – This is the belt the soldier wore for protection of his midsection. We are protected by God's truth. God's truth exposes every false teaching, every phony gospel, every one of Satan's lies, every effort on our part to try to claim some credit for our salvation. God's truth leads us to be truthful in all our dealings with one another.
- ***the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place*** – the equivalent of today's bulletproof vest. This isn't our righteousness. Our righteous acts are like filthy rags. This is Christ's righteousness, given to us in baptism, which protects us and prevents Satan from penetrating our hearts.
- ***with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals*** – the gospel gives peace. We are at peace with God through Christ. Soldiers of the cross are not waging war, they're waging peace. Their feet are propelled by good news from the Prince of Peace Himself. God is reconciled, at peace with the world, in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The enemy is already defeated. The holy war was waged on Calvary, and won when Jesus died. We get to announce it.
- ***the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One*** - the Romans carried a large shield which protected the entire body. The faith, all that the Bible teaches and that we by God's grace believe protects us. Roman soldiers often soaked the outer layers of their shields to help deal with flaming arrows. We, too, need to protect ourselves from Satan's well-placed, flaming arrows of doubt. Soaked in the water of your Baptism, cling to the shield of THE faith.
- ***the helmet of salvation*** – the Roman helmet was made of bronze and could only be pierced by an axe or a hammer. Salvation and the certainty of forgiveness we have in Jesus give us that same kind of protection. We have this right now – not later, not whenever...now. The cross is yours, the open tomb is yours. Life with God is yours. Now.

Finally, the offensive weapon...

- ***the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*** – certainly, the Word is also a defensive weapon, but the Roman soldier's straight, short dagger was primarily an offensive weapon. God's Word is powerful. It unleashes the power of the Holy Spirit. God's Word is our weapon in spiritual warfare. It is our only offensive weapon. It's the only offensive weapon we need.

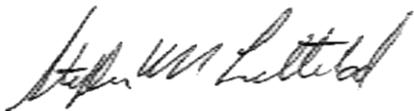
We don't need political strength, military might, physical or even intellectual strength. ***Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit***, said the Lord through the prophet Zechariah.

To take up the sword implies you know how to use it. Be careful, swords are sharp. This one – the Sword of the Spirit – separates the inseparable: joints and marrow, soul and spirit. Learn the Word, read it, take it in, meditate on it, study it. Learn to use it carefully, responsibly, powerfully. Because guns can be dangerous, there are gun safety classes available. We ought to have Bible safety classes to no one gets hurt. Actually we do. We call it Sunday School, confirmation class, and Bible study.

Pretty impressive armor. Know what makes it so? Every piece takes us back to Jesus, connects us to Jesus and the Gospel. From the belt of truth to the breastplate of righteousness, righteousness that comes from Christ, to feet fitted with the readiness that comes from – what else! – the gospel, to a shield of faith and a helmet of salvation to the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. All of it, every piece, connects us to our Savior.

During all of this, Paul reminds us to pray – to pray for one another, to pray for him. Prayer keeps the troops in the battlefield (us) in touch with the field commander (Jesus). Prayer is a powerful way for us to support one another. I'll use Paul's words: ***"Pray for me also, that when I open my mouth a message will be given to me that boldly reveals the mystery of the gospel...Pray that I may speak about it boldly, as it is necessary for me to speak."*** (6:19,20) Pray that the Word I preach and teach be God's Word. Pray that I have the courage to tell the truth, even if it's unpopular. Pray that I have the energy, the zeal, and the courage to speak this good news at every opportunity all over this community. Pray for the same for our teachers. And I pray the same for you – that you speak about Jesus with boldness and courage wherever and whenever God gives you opportunity.

Let's remember one thing – the war has already been won. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ rules. But the losers haven't given up yet. The devil and his demons still fight. Right in the middle of our lives. It's a last ditch effort to get you on the losing side before Christ comes back. These battles that we face are simply the skirmishes that remain until we reach our heavenly home. So put on the full armor of God. Use it. Fight on. Stand your ground. And after you have done everything, still stand strong – in the Lord.



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