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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 5, 2021
15th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-8, Mark 7:1-8, 21-23
Hymns: 294; 444; 398; 655

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Ephesians 6:10-20

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. ¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— ¹⁹ and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Prepared for what lies before you. --

Making plans is important in life. A major component in making plans, actually a great reason for making plans is that you are prepared for what's coming. It's great to have a planner in a family. Somebody's got to do it, and when it is done properly than the whole family is better equipped for what lies ahead, if that be a garden project, (we are in the closing of the growing season finishing the harvest of garden produce, and preparing for final tilling and preparing the garden for winter). Or it could be a craft project, you need to secure the necessary supplies, or a home improvement project, or a vacation trip. We recognize that with all these things there is a need to plan so that one might be prepared for what's coming, be it good or bad. One realizes that there are necessary arrangements as well as things to secure that will be needed along the way. We do all this planning for all these earthly things, so we also need to recognize the need to be properly prepared for spiritual things.

We are all on a spiritual journey, a pilgrimage through this life to our heavenly goal. We all have to keep that in mind so that we understand that this life is the journey, not the end goal, and we need to be attentive to attain our eternal goal. There will be challenges along the way. In fact, there will be constant challenges that would seek to throw us off track, to cause us to stumble in faith, to try to keep us from reaching that goal of eternal life. We need to be properly equipped for the spiritual challenges we will encounter. The Lord provides the proper equipment for the battle that lies before us. Yes, that's right, we are walking through a battlefield on our way to heaven, and we need to be prepared for battle. We daren't be oblivious to the dangers that surround us, but rather be properly attired to face the enemy. So, the Holy Spirit encourages us to:

THEME: Live Dressed for Battle.

To understand why, we need to --

I. Know the Enemy.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:10-12)

The devil is a force to be reckoned with. Underestimating the enemy, while at the same time **overestimating** one’s own strength can, indeed **will** end disastrously. Our spiritual lives can easily be like a scene in a Middle Ages war movie. You know, the scene where the peasant warriors go out to meet the invading forces of barbarians with nothing more than wood pitchforks that don’t even have sharp points. You know it is going to be a massacre! There is a need for superior strength. We need to be *“strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.”* (v.10)

*“With might of ours cannot be done soon were our loss effected,
But for us fights the Valiant One whom God Himself elected!”*

(The Lutheran Hymnal 262:2a)

The second point about knowing the enemy is knowing the enemy’s intent. We dare not minimize what’s at stake. Yet Christians do this all the time. We know the devil in real. We know he is wily and evil, and yet we don’t see any great danger in playing with the devil. **He wants to kill you.** He doesn’t care so much about your physical life. That will end soon enough for the devil’s purposes. We will all die. NO, he wants to destroy your faith, and kill you spiritually so that you will experience the eternal death of hell with the devil. That’s his goal! Your eternal life in heaven is what’s at stake.

The devil is engaged in a blood sport with eternal consequences, and **he knows it!** He will do his best to deceive you so that you fail to recognize the danger to your eternal soul he brings with his temptations.

Neglecting proper spiritual preparation, neglecting the hearing of God's Word and the instruction in righteousness we receive only from God through the Word is ultimately playing with fire. I mean that very literally! Neglecting things spiritual and failing to bring proper planning and preparation for our pilgrimage through this life is playing with hell fire. When we see children playing with fire we find it alarming because we have all seen the results. We have seen people who have been burnt. We know the pain. Playing with the devil is playing with hell fire, and those who get burnt, well, they may burn forever. This is no joke. This is serious business. Don't underestimate the enemy, or the need to be diligent in spiritual planning and preparations for this life. Don't fool with the devil. Don't toy with temptations to sin. The devil laughs at us. He has a powerful ally in this world which CONSTANTLY seeks to deceive you. As for your personal resolve and will power standing up to the powers of evil? The devil laughs.

With might of ours cannot be done, soon were our loss effected"

(The Lutheran Hymnal 262:2a)

Listen, pay attention to the Lord.

II. Put on the Armor of the Gospel.

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ... 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. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:10-11, 13-17)

We need **God's** strength, the strength that comes to us by the working of the Holy Spirit, who works through the Word. The longer we neglect the Word the more we depend on our own strength. We need to be strong **in the Lord**, not in ourselves! Again, I will say, we cannot depend on our own strength. We need the power of His might! **Live dressed for battle!** Put on the whole armor of God!

We start with wrapping the truth around our waist, around the body. The devil is the father of lies. He is an expert in using the half-truth in order to deceive. He loves to call God's Word into question. If you are even a little rusty in your knowledge of the truth, you may pause a second too long when the devil asks, "*Did God actually say?*" (Genesis 3:1ESV) and the devil will lead you into the lie for the day! His favorite lie is of course that your sins are NOT forgiven, that you must work to earn God's favor. And just like that the certainty of salvation is replaced by doubt and fear. You need to have the truth wrapped securely around you, the truth of God's Word, that truth of the gospel.

And as for the heart and vital spiritual organs, well you need a breastplate as part of your armor, the breastplate of the righteousness of God. This righteousness isn't about God being holy and righteous, but about the righteousness He presents to us by grace through faith in Christ crucified. This is the righteousness of God that keeps us in God's peace.

And that brings us to the proper footwear for making your trek through this life. You better be wearing the gospel as you make your way through this life lest you be tripped up, falling on your face when the devil tempts you with that pet sin you do your very best to rationalize away as not being so bad. We so often think, "I need this or that to make it through life!" I heard that one more than once from Christians just in the last month. The devil can make us delusional when it comes to sin! And that is true for me too. It is true for all of us. He encourages us to think, "My sin isn't really that bad. It's not like I'm killing somebody," or "Everybody else is doing it so it can't be that bad!" or "I know God wants me to be happy, and this makes me happy."

Wear proper spiritual footwear. Don't get tripped up so that you stumble and fall! "*We were buried with Him (Christ) through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*" (Romans 6:4)

You will also have to deal with the fiery darts of the devil, those accusations of sins you most certainly have committed, even this

past week, even today! These fiery darts will be aimed right at your heart of faith, to get you to think: “*Christians don’t do what I did,*” or “*what I just said,*” or even “*what I thought,*” or “*Real Christians don’t express the anger or frustration that I feel.*” All those fiery darts are aimed to kill and are extinguished by the shield of faith. Trust Jesus and His shed blood shed upon the cross for you. Know that even as we fall everyday, so we are forgiven and made clean by the blood of Christ everyday.

Put on the helmet of salvation as well! Don’t let the devil have an open shot on your mind. The world would convince you that we need to adjust our way of thinking to conform to the world’s way of thinking, to conform to science, even when the science isn’t science, but rather the lies of the devil devised to deny the power and wisdom of God evident in creation. When we stop reviewing the truth of Genesis chapters 1- 9, we are setting aside the helmet of God’s gospel and choosing our own human wisdom to protect ourselves. That is risky beyond belief.

Finally, we need to arm ourselves with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. How well do you know your Scriptures? When did you last review any Scriptures that you memorized in Sunday school or catechism? Do you think that was simply an exercise of our youth? It was arming ourselves for battle with the sword of the Spirit. We need the Word of God. We need to know it. We need to be able to wield it. We need to learn it, memorize it, review it. Jesus memorized the Scriptures! The Apostles memorized the Scriptures. All the generations that have gone before us have memorized and recited **and wielded** Bible passages as weapons against the evil of the devil, the evil of this world, even, or especially, against our own sinful desires! This sword is good for defense, but it is even better for offense, for cutting into the conscience, and then bringing the gospel to a needy soul. That is a great blow against the devil!

*“Tho’ devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill, They cannot overpower us.
This world’s prince may still scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none, He’s judged; the deed is done;
One little **word** can fell him.”* (The Lutheran Hymnal 262:3)

Finally, we need to call upon the name of the Lord for ourselves and our fellow Christians especially the messengers of the gospel.

III. Pray with Perseverance.

Paul concludes with this powerful exhortation to pray!

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—¹⁹ and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” (Ephesians 6:18-20)

Prayer is such an important aspect of our spiritual lives. It is one of those things that needs deliberate focus. We tend to pray when we feel some discomfort. We tend to pray a lot about temporal and physical things. We might feel awkward praying for spiritual things. We have all heard, “Practice makes perfect.” While practice may make praying more comfortable, how great is it that the Holy Spirit makes our prayers perfect!

A great deal of our prayer life is with formulated prayers. There’s nothing wrong with that. Table prayers, bedtimes prayers, maybe include some morning prayers in the mix, and incorporating the Lord’s Prayer in daily life, these are wonderful because they include a great many different things that we need for both body and soul. But let us also practice some prayers from the heart. Pray for a stronger faith. Pray for strength against temptation, especially with that problem sin in your life. Pray that the Lord give you opportunity and wisdom to testify to the truth of Jesus Christ with your friend or neighbor. Pray for the right words to speak when we are challenged on what the world regards as a social issue, but we know to be a spiritual, moral issue.

Pray for your fellow Christians. Pray that the Lord direct people back to worshiping together that we might grow in faith and encourage one another along the way. Pray for our Christian brethren around the world who are facing great challenges to body and soul because of their faith in Jesus. Use the monthly “CLC World Missions Prayer List” as a helpful guide. Pray.

Paul reminds us of how much he desired the prayers of his fellow Christians. That really highlights the importance of prayer. If we can do nothing else because of our circumstances in life, we can pray, and that is good, and that is powerful. Pray for the messengers of the gospel, that they speak the Word of God in its truth and purity. Pray for the messengers of the gospel that they speak the truth boldly. Pray for your pastor that the Spirit would grant me wisdom and zeal, and that the Lord bless the word I speak in the Lord's name.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” (v.10 -11)

Live Dressed for Battle!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.