

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 6, 2015
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

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BE STRONG IN THE LORD

Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11) Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

Dear friends in Christ:

Next Friday will mark the 14th anniversary of the infamous 9-11 terrorist attacks. Several years ago I noticed a sign someone had posted along the roadside in one of the communities north of our area that simply said: Don't forget 7-11. Hmm. Of course the event is obviously more important than the date. Time has a way of dulling our memories doesn't? Our fear of terrorism certainly isn't at the same level as it was back in 2001 in the days and months that followed those attacks. We've come to rely on some of the anti-terrorism measures that were instituted years ago to keep us safe. We live our lives as usual giving little or no thought to our enemies.

The same may well be true in our spiritual lives. It's hard to go about our daily lives and still remember that **our enemy, the devil, still prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.** (1 Peter 5:8) The devil is counting on the fact that we are going to let down our guard and grow careless so that he will be successful in his attacks against us. Surely, we can benefit from the encouragement that the Apostle Paul gave to the Ephesians: **be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.** Fellow warriors:

Theme: Let the Lord Make You Strong

1. Strong against the Devil and his Schemes
2. Strong in the Lord with the full armor of God

Much has been said in military annals about the importance of knowing the enemy. It's important that we know the enemy who seeks to rob us of our spiritual security and our eternal destiny. It's equally important for us to know ourselves. Our text aides us both in knowing ourselves and the enemy.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

By directing us to be strong in the Lord our text reminds us that we have no strength of our own. Our strength comes from the Lord as the Psalmist reminds us: **The Lord is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.** Apart from the Lord we can do nothing (cf. John 15:5) But God outfits us with his strength and his armor – a complete defensive and offensive outfit designed especially with our enemy in mind. **11) Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood...**

The various pieces of the armor the Lord supplies are intended to be used together – every piece needs to be in its place as will become obvious when we take a closer look at the various components of the armor that the Lord provides for us.

We need strength from the Lord not only because we have none of our own but also because of the strength of our enemy and his schemes. Our enemy may not have much in the way of armor but he is a sly and

cunning enemy – an enemy who is more than blood & flesh as Paul described him in the original language of this text. At times, our enemy uses our sinful flesh for his evil purposes; at times, he uses the sinful people in this world for his evil purposes, but he himself is not human. Our enemy is a spiritual enemy who is highly organized in his efforts to struggle against the Lord and his chosen ones.

Our struggle is a battle **against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.** That's Paul's way of speaking about the Devil and his angels. We may not have a complete understanding of each of these terms: rulers, authorities, powers, and spiritual forces of evil – but this much we can say is that our enemy is numerous, he's organized for battle with chiefs and heads of various groups. There are attacking powers, ruling powers and wicked powers at his disposal – all more than eager to engage us in a struggle – in hand to hand combat – in a wrestling match.

In the second chapter of this letter, the Apostle Paul reminds us that we have been set free from the ways of this world and from the spirit who is at work in the disobedient. By God's grace to us in Christ, we have been set free from their control to live lives of faith; to do works, which God has prepared us to do. However, that doesn't mean that we can forget our enemy. The devil's forces are waiting for another battle, another opportunity to take us captive. Knowledge of our enemy and of self convinces us to let the Lord make us strong against the Devil and his schemes.

The knowledge reminds us of our need to Let the Lord make us strong in the Lord with the full armor of God. Paul reminds us: **Therefore 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.**

You and I have no idea when we will be called upon to resist the forces of the evil one. His attacks could come at anytime. We need to be ready and alert as Peter reminded us. Part of that readiness means being dressed for battle.

The men and women who enlist in the armed forces today often begin their service at home far away from the major conflicts. Non-the-less they endure rigorous training and are issued equipment in the event that they may be called to battle. That is also how it is for soldiers in the Lord's army – his church.

God has called us to his service with the knowledge that eventually we will be called upon to combat the forces of evil as they launch a direct attack on us. They will attack and accuse us – seeking to separate us from the Lord and his Church with a wide variety of lies and schemes and evil plans. It is only when we are equipped with the full armor of God that we will be able to stand our ground and fend off the attacks of Satan and his allies and to stand victorious when the battle is done.

Thank God, that he provides us with the arms for those days and that it is his will for us to overcome and gain the victory. Dear Christian soldiers consider the full armor that God has given you for your battle and take courage. Stand strong in the strength of the Lord with the full armor of God.

14) Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15) and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16) In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17) Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18) And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

It's interesting to note that Paul wrote the words of this epistle as he was in prison – one wonders if his picture was suggest by the appearance of the ever present soldier who stood guard over him.

Let's briefly consider the full armor – the panoply – of God as it is presented to us in today's text. We'll begin with the belt – a girdle or waist belt much wider than the ones we wear to keep our pants in place. This wide belt would have covered and protected the most vulnerable body parts which were the target of the ancient sword fighters. The sword fighter was taught to thrust the sword upward into the groin and into the abdomen, through the stomach and lungs and ultimately into the heart. The belt protected those areas. And so it is that the TRUTH of God will protect us from becoming vulnerable to the lies and deceits of Satan. Armed with the truth we will be able to discern what is good and pleasing in God's sight. Armed with the Truth we can be sure of salvation and of our forgiveness when faced with the accusations of conscience or Satan. Armed with the Truth that Christ Jesus has defeated sin, death and Satan for us we will be able to take our stand and ultimately to stand firm unto eternal life.

Next, there is a breast plate – we'd probably call it a bullet proof vest. The breast plate protected the chest and heart. Our breast plate is the righteousness of God – a righteousness that is not of our own but is a gift from God. This righteousness is provided by Christ and comes to us through faith in him.

Next Paul mentioned military foot ware (combat boots). The soldier would need proper foot ware for sure footing and a strong gait. What is it that equips us for the walk of faith? It is the Gospel of peace that makes us ready to walk the life of faith. The peace that we enjoy with God for Christ's sake puts us at odds with the devil, with our sinful flesh and the sinful world. The Gospel of peace also prepares us for our battle against the one who seek to rob us of that peace.

Then we also have the shield of faith. The shield that Paul spoke of was four feet tall and 2 ½ feet wide. When a soldier was in battle stance this shield offered protection for his whole body. Faith offers us protection from the accusations of sin and its condemnation by clinging to the forgiveness Christ won for us, by providing us with access to God and assuring us of eternal life. Faith, the gift of the Holy Spirit renders us holy and blameless before God so that the flaming accusations of Satan fall harmless to the ground.

Although the soldier could shield his body with his shield, he would never hide his face behind it – he needed to be able to see on all sides to know where the opponent was. That's why the soldier would wear a helmet to protect his head. You and I have the helmet of salvation – the salvation, safety and protection that is ours as children of God. Confident of this salvation we hold our head high in all situations.

A soldier's suit of armor would not be complete if it just included the defensive elements that we have discussed so far. The soldier at a minimum would be armed with a sword and so you and I have been armed with the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.

Armed with the word you and I are equipped to reach out to rescue others who are enslaved by sin and the devil. The powerful word will enlighten many just as we have been enlightened by it. It will rescue many from the darkness of sin. It will call many to faith just it has called us to faith and will equip them for battle just as we have been equipped.

Finally, a well-prepared soldier will have a battle cry to speak and shout as he heads to the battle field, The Christian soldier has prayer as his battle cry. As the saying goes, the power of prayer doesn't need to be proven it needs to be practiced.

As Paul indicates in our text we have all kinds of opportunities to practice prayer: **always keep on praying for all the saints. 19) Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20) for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.**

Our prayers may be personal but they do not need to be self-centered. We are to remember the saints – our brothers and sisters in Christ and their needs in our prayers. We can especially remember the Lord’s called messengers in our prayers asking that the Lord would bless them with courage, conviction, and confidence in their tasks.

May the Lord answer our mutual prayers for each other by enabling us to be strong in the Lord:

1. Strong against the Devil and his Schemes
2. Strong with the full armor of God.

Amen.