

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Pentecost 15B - Proper 17B  
September 1, 2024  
Ephesians 6:10-20

### Standing Against the Enemy

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 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 6:10-12 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

It's hard to be a Christian because we are under constant attack. You see, being a Christian is not so much about following a code of ethics or morality as it is following our Lord Jesus and hearing His words. Christianity is not so much about behavior as it is about faith in Christ. As we believe in Jesus, we will keep His Word, including His Commandments, treasuring it and guarding it as the most precious possession we have. Yet, our standing before God is not based on our success at keeping His commandments. It is based solely on Jesus Who gave His life for us to save us from our enemies who would lead us away from Him to our destruction.

So, as God's children, we are at war. But not against others, or even each other. The enemy we face is not political, cultural, or managerial. Rather, we are each in a life and death struggle against the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. We dare never underestimate the situation for eternity is at stake. We must remain ever vigilant and fight. Our life depends on it.

To see how serious and difficult the situation is, listen to Jesus, "from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." (Mark 7:21-23). You see, it's not just the devil and the world against us. It's also we ourselves. We have no excuses. Our shortcomings and failures are not someone else's fault. We are sinful and unclean from the inside out.

So Jesus cleanses us by His Word – the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Thus, He has done everything to create a clean heart within us by making our sins His own, bleeding and dying for them, forgiving them, giving us His Spirit. He gives us His Body and Blood

to eat and to drink to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and empower us to fight against the evil that lurks within the heart of man, even your heart.

Then, with each passing day, we see increasing attacks upon Christ and His Church by the world. Laws, lawsuits, accusations, threats, ridicule, and much more is directed against any who would honor Christ and hold to His teaching. Every time we turn around there's another event, another activity, another something to draw us away from our Savior and His life-giving Word. Yet, God wants us to do "the statutes and the just decrees" that He teaches us. He wants us to "keep the commandments of the Lord [our] God" without adding to them or subtracting from them. He wants us to live according to His righteous Word, cling to it, and teach it "to [our] children and [our] children's children." (Deut. 4:9).

And again, whatever the world may throw at you, it has already thrown at Jesus – pain, death, grief, sorrow, anger, injustice, and more. Yet He has overcome the world (John 16:33). So, as you are in Christ and He is in you, you are God's dear child "for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4). "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world- our faith." (1 John 5:4). And this faith is God's gift to you.

And if our sinful nature and the world weren't bad enough, St. Paul tells us we don't fight against flesh and blood as we often think. Rather, each one of us, is in a life and death struggle against the powers of darkness and the spiritual forces of evil. We are at war with the devil himself and his minions. Children of God are under constant attack because we are baptized into Christ. Christ has already won the war as He declared from Calvary's cross, "It is finished!" and when He descended into hell to proclaim His victory there. The devil has been defeated, but he refuses to acknowledge that fact. He cannot win the war against Christ, so he continues to wage war against Christ's Bride, the Church. And as we are members of Christ's body, we are engaged in that struggle, but we are not left powerless or defenseless.

Yet, a word of caution is in order. The devil is a schemer beyond our comprehension. He is the father of lies and often appears as an angel of light. So if we are not always on the lookout, we may easily fall into his trap. He tries to raise doubts in our minds just as he did when he said to Eve, "Did God really say . . .?" He tries to instill fear in our hearts by trying to convince us that God is angry with us because of our sins. He distracts us from God and His Word by whatever means possible. He attacks a little bit at a time and wears us down. Oftentimes, we won't even realize that we are being attacked.

So, if left to ourselves, to our own reason or strength, we're doomed. We can't withstand the devil's assaults by ourselves. In fact, because of our sinful nature, we don't want too. We'd rather give in. So we are easy prey for the ravenous lion who roams about, seeking whom he may devour.

But God does not leave us defenseless. As a Bridegroom who protects His Bride, as a Father who protects His dear children, God provides all that we need to stand and fight! He dresses us for battle. When King Saul tried to dress David in his armor to fight Goliath, David refused it, because he knew the truth that Paul speaks of. The battle is not against flesh and blood. That's why our Lord does not want you to be unaware, my friends. Do not be deceived. Do not give in to the devil and his schemes, ever. But fight! Resist him! For God gives you all that you need not only to fight, but to win! He dresses you for battle.

Indeed, He gives you His own armor which will not fail you. He gives you this armor as He clothes you with Jesus. For Jesus is the belt of truth even as He says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6). Only this Truth and nothing but this Truth can protect you from the devil's lying schemes. Likewise, Jesus is the breastplate of righteousness which protects you whenever Satan attempts to wound you by reminding you of the evil you have done, especially that secret sin you wish would remain buried and forgotten. Jesus righteousness protects you from these attacks, for all of your sins have been paid for by Christ and buried with Him. All of your sins have been washed clean in His blood.

Shod with the Gospel of peace and the helmet of salvation you are covered with Jesus from head to foot. His life, His death, His resurrection, His forgiveness, protect you in every way so you can stand firm in the evil day. Thus, dressed for battle, God gives you the shield of faith which receives from Him the atoning work of Christ, and more, it receives Christ Himself who alone can extinguish the fiery darts fired against you. Such faith trusts in Him alone for help and protection against your worst enemies.

Finally, you are also armed with the sword of the Spirit. This sword, the Word of God itself, repels each thrust and parry of the evil one even as it attacks with the fulness of Christ Himself. Thus clothed and armed you can withstand every assault of the devil and fight back with God's Word, even as Jesus did. For, after all, it's really Jesus fighting for you and He has already defeated the devil for you and rescued you from his dominion.

So, Beloved, though we are at war with the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, God cleanses our hearts and clothes us with His armor, even His dear Son whom He gave for us and our salvation. He assures the victory. So pray in the Spirit for yourself and for all who are under attack that they would realize the victory which is their's in Christ Jesus. And if you should feel especially under assault, sing with all your might:

Satan, hear this proclamation: I am baptized into Christ!  
Drop your ugly accusation, I am not so soon enticed.  
Now that to the font I've traveled, All your might has come unraveled,

And, against your tyranny, God, my Lord, unites with me! (LSB 594.3).

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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