

**Sermon - Proper 16, Year B**  
**Ephesians 6:10-20**  
**The Armor of God**

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

A discipline of prayer that has always been dear to me is the praying of the rosary. I imagine most of you are at least a little bit familiar with a rosary, perhaps just what it looks like. There are 59 beads in total, a centerpiece, and a crucifix. Each is accompanied by its own prayer, and the prayers are repeated, gently inviting the one who prays to contemplate the life of Jesus. I learned to pray the rosary when I was young, and the thing you recognize quite quickly is that while the prayers might seem repetitive at first, they soon take on a life of their own. I found that praying like this silenced the inner disruptions of the soul. The prayers gather up the fragmented pieces of the personality. They root us again to the ground and remind us that our foundation is always Christ.

I can't tell you when I began to do this, but somewhere along the way, as I prayed the rosary for people, I imagined the prayers becoming small points of light. Each prayer I spoke for someone became like a small star hung delicately in the air, and as the rosary unfolded, I imagined God weaving a garland of light and draping it gently around the person I am praying for. Sometimes I am praying for myself. Sometimes I'm praying for you. And then I get to imagine each of you, draped in gold, protected by love, surrounded by starlight. Suddenly it becomes clear that human beings really are quite beautiful.

Now, this isn't magic. This isn't merely a case of overactive imagination. Prayer invites us to see what is true. It insists upon our dignity, and it reveals us the dimensions of the heart. Prayer, ultimately, shows us that we are loved.

So, too, we receive an invitation to see things in a new and remarkable way in Paul's words to the Ephesians this morning. He tells us, "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm." He then proceeds through a litany of images that describe a fresh interpretation of the clothing and gear that would've been worn by a Roman soldier. A breastplate, a belt, a helmet, a sword. Paul's hearers would have recognized these images right away, and indeed, we recognize them too.

It is likely that this letter to the Ephesians was composed in the late 50s or early 60s of the first century. Jesus had died, been resurrected, and ascended to the Father about twenty years before this, and the first communities of believers were becoming anxious. Jesus had promised that he would return, and it was commonly expected that he would return within his disciples' own lifetime. At this point, twenty-some years on, some of Jesus' earliest followers had already died, and some of the apostles themselves had already been martyred. Jesus had promised healing and redemption, and yet many of the communities that followed his way found that instead of their lives becoming easier and easier, they were becoming more difficult and more frightening. Why hadn't Jesus come back yet? Had he abandoned them? Why did the world still feel so dark?

And so Paul speaks into the darkness. *Fasten the belt of truth about your waist.* This truth is the resurrection, the truth of Jesus Christ's eternal reign. *Put on the breastplate of righteousness.* This righteousness is the honor and dignity of a life lived alongside Jesus, and it will protect your heart. "As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace." Isn't it interesting here that Paul chose "shoes" to describe what one needs to preach the Gospel. Shoes allow us to leave our homes - to step outside, to walk out into our

neighborhoods and cities and encounter one another, move with one another, explore and learn and grow together. The Gospel is never a solitary enterprise.

“Take the shield of faith,” the letter continues, “with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” How remarkable to imagine faith as a shield, and no ordinary shield, but one strong and light and graceful enough to stop every possible threatening thing. Then there is the helmet of salvation – almost a crown, of sorts – a sign of victory and strength. And the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Now, this too isn’t magic. This isn’t a case of an overactive imagination. Paul is inviting his listeners to recognize what is true. What is true is that we have been clothed in protection and faithfulness. In Jesus Christ, we are given a full set of armor that doesn’t just equip us for battle but in fact *shows us that the battle has already been won*. It is not just some childish fantasy to picture your fellow human beings draped in garlands of light. It is not a childish fantasy to picture yourself waking up for the day, looking down at your body and finding it resplendent with a belt of truth and shield of faith. This is, in fact, precisely who we are.

We may be feeling a bit like the Ephesians these days. Where is Jesus? Why hasn’t he come back? Doesn’t he care about the evil and darkness that surround us? But here is our hope. We are invited to look down and see upon ourselves this whole armor of God. We have already received it. We may forget that it’s there. We may doubt, sometimes, that we deserve it or that we ever had it. But what Paul reminds the Ephesians and reminds us today is that really, all we need do is look into the mirrors of our hearts and see what is true.

Each one of us is ready to meet whatever it is that this world might throw at us. We are equipped, together, to stand firm in holiness and joy. God knows we forget this and he certainly

knows how we suffer, but the bible is ripe with insistence that we are redeemed by a love that cannot, will not ever let us go.

In Christ, **we are each made strong**, even – especially – in our weakness. And it is not by our faith - or actions or worthiness or even our imaginations - but by his love for us.

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.