

“Engaging Our Armor – One in the Spirit”
B Pentecost 14, Ephesians 6:10-20
August 29, 2021; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

The Whole Armor of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For our^[a] struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵ As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ With all of these,^[a] take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench 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 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,^[a] ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

I. EXPLORE TOGETHER THIS PAST WEEK

The full armor of God. We’ve been immersing ourselves in this scripture passage and set of symbols for a couple weeks—in order to understand how this ancient military metaphor might work for us in our time. In our own spiritual journey—individually and collectively.

You have a children’s bulletin to have some fun with –not because you are children, but because we learn and immerse ourselves in different ways and we adults often forget to play a bit –get down into the dirt and really experience a passage in many ways.

Last week we posed the challenge:

Go out into the week and look for armor. What do you need? Protection? Courage? Bravery? Tools to help you be assertive, or stand fast and strong in the face of challenges? How does what you find FIT? Is there more fitting armor than the traditional sword and shield, combat boots and ballistic rhetoric that we are surrounded by in our society?

So, today, we share together for a few minutes, as we consider together the armor of the Lord in these times—what we might need and what we are given, all around us. Where did the armor of God emerge around you this week?

II. LOOKING FOR ARMOR AROUND US

Roman Shields:

Bill and Scott and others wrestled with the math on that idea—if each one was 1.5 persons wide, you’d only get ¼ extra on each side. Or, you’d need to be in groups of 3 and not a whole line, in order to leave no gaps. Three is a biblical number—like a Trinity—so that’s a good image.

The Roman armies, however, did make it work to form a solid line that the enemies could not penetrate—no groupings of three; no getting through.

The shield was actually the legionaries most important piece of equipment. Its purpose was to provide protection for the left half of the bearer’s own body, and equally important to provide protection for the right half of the body of the man to the immediate left. This allowed the front rank of the legion to provide a solid wall of shields, with small gaps through which the soldiers stabbed with their swords.

Might have been as much as a meter out to the side, per some sources—though I don't know how you'd hold that up! Must be heavy!

The important thing was that each person was not just protecting themselves but looking out for their neighbor as well! Covering more than just their own bodies or backyards. That's the metaphor the Body of Christ can learn from the Roman shields, as we consider the full armor of God in our day.

Ron Erickson reminded us:

'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty.

Arlene shared the very real struggle that folks around us might use the armor of God as a weapon! An excuse for not protecting ourselves and others from harm—believing that Jesus' promises in scripture can be taken out of context and used against our neighbor. What a challenging irony that is—hard to combat, isn't it?

I've been struggling with that as well—folks quoting scripture proclaiming God takes away our fear as an excuse for not using the protection that is available to us to protect our neighbors.

They quote a passage from I Timothy—but only *half* the sentence!

“God does not give us a spirit of Fear”.....If you believe in God enough, you won't have fear and won't get sick...

But there's another part to that!

“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity *or* cowardice *or* fear, but [He has given us a spirit] of power and of love and of sound judgment *and* personal discipline [abilities that result in a calm, well-balanced mind and self-control].

Steve Jackson had a great insight about wearing protective gear when he mountain bikes. “With all the gear—head to toe—

available to me, I can reach new heights, try things and greater challenges I wouldn't otherwise attempt—get out of my comfort zone because I am well-armored.

Clarke echoed a similar idea when we were exploring this “armor subject” this week. He remembered his motorcycling days—leathers and helmet from head to toe, and how on hot days, when he dared to unzip the leather jacket or be tempted not to wear a helmet, how vulnerable and uncourageous he felt.

III. IMAGES FROM AROUND HERE

What does armor look like around here?

*Shower sleeves and ice machines!

Armor might look like—plastic shower sleeves so you can still take showers when both arms are casted!

Friends bringing company and supper for your spouse so you can go to surgery and not worry.

Friends and family who drive and spend long days with you for surgery.

Or take your cat to the vet, or car to the shop, or ...

*Shoulder—Quarterback pads and straps and braces!

*Casts, propping pillows, walkers, canes, trekking poles, and scooters to protect from falling anymore.

(Kathy Roman, myself, Ann, Marge, Warren)

Warren walked out of church with a Waldorf on each arm last week—there's an image of the full armor of God—walking arm-in-arm together!

It also looks like drivers and offers of help—getting to appointments, picking up prescriptions, bringing huge bags of ice for the ice machine!

Soup left on the porch or driveway; casseroles, muffins, pie, cookies—help with showering and tucking in at night. Managing medications when you're in a bit of a blur.

Sometimes an army of angels appears when you have a traumatic incident with a cat meeting its demise in front of your car and the armor of God appears in the form of Scott carrying out two shovels and Avis asking if you are okay and taking care of the remains.

I saw an army of muscle helping Janet move chairs and tables to get ready for the Bazaar. All that working together—at different levels of ability, physical and otherwise—is part of the armor of God in our community.

A lovely supportive web has come around Marge Dorfmeister during this difficult transition in her life. Love, listening, meals, caretaking, ice cream, sharing memories and rides, many hands helping.

IV. PONDERING ARMOR

When I studied the Greek word “panaplion” it stressed the fullness of the gear. The “full armor of God” is not an accident in this passage. It's about the whole shebang! Girding and guarding ourselves with everything available.

It's much like our word **Panoply**: “a complete or impressive collection of things. An array, a range, a collection. A full set of armor!”

I also learned that armor in the time of Paul writing to the Ephesians was BOTH offensive and defensive. When we thinking of surrounding ourselves with the full armor of God in community, that's such a fitting image.

We reach out with our arms and acts to care and help, while also guarding our own hearts and one another with God's protection

and loving care. Protect our energies and efforts in order to pace ourselves and keep balanced.

Remember how King Saul's armor didn't fit young David? He was taking on too much. Taking on weights and responsibilities that were not his to take on—too much—and they toppled him. When David took a fitting amount of armor—the slingshot and five stones—that was just enough for what he was called to do.

A. Umbrella

One of the commentators on this passage suggested an **umbrella** as a current-day metaphor. I've been chewing on that one. What do you think?

Paul Blass: “You need a shield. A shield? Well, okay, how about an **umbrella**? Something to hold over you, to go before you, to protect you from the elements, to keep you dry when the weather turns nasty.

Something to hold out and to hold on to, something that will remind you that it isn't always a bright sunny day when all is right with the world. Sometimes the skies do grow dark; sometimes the winds will blow; sometimes rain will fall. So you need something to keep you from drowning in your own despair.

Take the umbrella of faith and hold on tight. When the weather gets rough, when the questions fall like rain, when the tears form puddles at your feet, when the clouds of doubt rumble overhead, then hold tight to your faith.

Hold on to that knowledge that you are a child of God, to the experience of being pulled up from off your knees by the hand of one much stronger than you, to that feeling of being made clean again and given a fresh start. Hold on to that; and though the rain may fall, and you may get wet along the way, the center is dry and strong and still remembers that the sun still shines behind the clouds. Carry faith as your shield.

B. An Army to the Rescue

A horrific accident happened Friday night on 285, in the Kings Valley area near Conifer. A pick-up driving erratically and far too fast, passed on a double-yellow line and destroyed a family. A woman and her grand-daughter were killed and others were seriously injured. The whole community is reeling, and have been talking about the trauma of it all on social media.

Some have looked for a place to place blame—on CDOT or the law enforcement, or EMS. Others just did everything they possibly could to help— jumping out of cars and running to respond, sending prayers and offers of support.

This heartwarming message came from the Elk Creek Fire Department. A better kind of “full Armor of God.”

Dear Community,

Thank you for giving us your hands and hearts today. We are once again moved by your humanity and service to your community. To those who helped us today on the motor vehicle crash on Hwy 285 (and there were MANY of you), thank you, thank you, thank you. You performed heroic acts before we were even there. You helped us put out fire. You helped us cut open cars. You helped us take care of patients. You walked through rocky terrain in your flip-flops to help look for victims. You waited patiently in traffic for a long, long time. We all worked together today, uniform or no uniform. You took care of people; you took care of each other; you took care of your community. You are why we love working here.

We also know some of you saw things that you are not used to seeing, and you did things you have never had to do. We personally know what it's like to deal with difficult emotions, to ruminate, to see images in our heads, to wonder, to feel broken-hearted or haunted. So, we want you to know that we advocate for you getting support if you are bothered in the least by anything you saw or did today. Talking to someone who is able to hold a safe space for those emotions and thoughts can be critical for processing, whether that is a friend or a professional.

Finally, our hearts are heavy and go out to the families and friends impacted by today's tragedy. May they be comforted and find peace moving forward through this painful time.

Platte Canyon Fire Protection District, Evergreen Fire/Rescue, Inter-Canyon Fire Protection District, North Fork Fire Rescue, Jeffcom 911, Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, Colorado State Patrol - Thank you so much for all your assistance today.

“Engaging Our Armor—One in the Spirit”

Let us continue to arm ourselves with the entire armor of God —everything at our disposal to guard ourselves and one another against the harm of the world. Let us be the bear hugs of God, embracing others—near and far—in Holy Love. Let us look for opportunities to engage our armor for good—arming ourselves and one another with all kinds of tools and support. One in the Spirit, one in the Lord. Amen.