

“Enveloped in the Armor of God”
B Pentecost 13, Ephesians 6:10-20
August 22, 2021; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
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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,^[b] 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,^[c] ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

I. INTERESTING TIMES REQUIRE...

It's been a week, hasn't it?! Or, maybe a month! Or a year...season...eon. Not just this pandemic, that seems to never end, but this time in our country and communities and world.

It's been quite the time for many of us with accidents, surgeries, illnesses, family concerns, transitions, losses, gains, joys and concerns all over the place, and of every kind imaginable.

Cameron Trimble, a UCC consultant, writes about a young nephew on a cancer journey that tests and tries everyone's hope, grief and patience. She describes it as: “**A roller-coaster of hope and heartbreak.**”

I saw her story one early morning when I was unable to sleep due to a rollercoaster kind of week in our family, and I thought, “That's it!” That's the kind of journey it feels like we're all on right now. Just when something hopeful and joyous happens, the whackamole comes along with another injury to a loved one—(two-or-four legged alike!); or diagnosis we don't want to hear, or loss to our community of various kinds.

We certainly live in “interesting times” as humankind, and as a church community and in our families.

“**a roller-coaster of hope and heartbreak.**”

And sometimes, all we can do is just “hold onto our seats” and one another on the wild ride—arming ourselves with hope and faith and mutual strength and support.

II. A LETTER TO LIFT US

And into these times—more challenging than interesting, I would submit!—comes this Letter to the Church at Ephesus—written perhaps by Paul himself or more likely someone “in Paul's workshop.”

This Letter of advice to a community is rich with suggestions, frameworks, exhortations—to unity, to faithful living of ‘the calling to which you are called.’ We've been exploring that calling to live ever-so intentionally—in the Spirit, and *in* community—not so much as rugged individuals, as the world would have us be.

We do, however, look at our own lives and needs, for we know that to love our neighbor and live fully and generatively in community, we must tend to our own bodies and souls, care for our own families within God's family—right along with loving our neighbor. We know that loving ourselves and caring for ourselves is *not* the same as “It's all about me and mine and my individual rights” at the expense of others.

And so, we have also been exploring “what is the song our soul wants to sing?”—both as an individual soul and as a communal Voice raised to God in praise, gratitude, joy and commitment.

This week, we come to the final chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians, and all that good advice about how to live and be, walk and breathe in community as healthy souls, comes to a culmination in this powerful and perhaps puzzling, metaphor: “Finally, Dear Brothers and Sisters, put on the Full Armor of God!”

Not just part of it. Not just what fits. Not just what suits you. Not one piece one day and one piece another, depending on the situation! But, the FULL armor of God—in order to walk strong in the Lord.

III. ENGAGE & EXPERIMENT

The sixth chapter of Ephesians is packed with these images—six kinds of armor—and we can only unpack so much at once—it could be a whole sermon series! We will spend a couple weeks playing with this image—seeing where our faith meets life as we engage scripture and metaphors for the Life of Faith—together.

There's a new kind of Church on the horizon—called by many names—but the basic idea is this: You can't truly live the life of faith by simply coming to church, hearing the scripture and the preacher's interpretation of it, and go home—head full of “stuff” that you may or may not remember come Monday morning.

Each of our spiritual journeys—our walk with God—is unique, and we have to dig in, engage the scriptures, explore the

meanings for ourselves, and do some practice in the walk of faith, alongside one another.

You are invited to a two-week experiment to get us started. Let's see how it goes! If we find we are more fully engaged, creative and connected with one another and our faith, then we can keep experimenting into the fall.

II. IMAGINE ARMOR

Today, we're going to start by imagining armor. What comes to mind when you hear that line: “Put on the full armor of God?”

A song from childhood Sunday School? Or a coloring sheet or children's bulletin, perhaps?

David and Goliath story—Do you remember a story from your childhood Sunday School about armor?

David was a young lad who was the only one brave enough to take on Goliath—a huge and scary warrior from the Philistines. David agreed to fight him so King Saul said, “Here, put on my armor.” Well, it was ridiculous! It was heavy and huge and David couldn't stand, much less move around enough to engage in a confrontation. So he said, “Thanks but no thanks,” to King Saul and took it all off and picked up a slingshot and five pebbles instead.

Sometimes armor fits and is appropriate and sometimes it doesn't and isn't. As we've been sharing, the militant overtones in this metaphor from Ephesians strike our ears strange, or are used in our times in a harmful way—not what Paul intended, and not what Jesus would have us do.

So, we need new understandings of this framework for ourselves, in our times. Armor can be many things and serve the purposes of the people of God in the walk of faith.

III. ARMOR OF ANOTHER KIND?

David's armor did not fit!

What if these images in our scriptures from the first century feel the same? Like they just don't fit—our times, our culture, our peace-making sensibilities as we follow the Prince of Peace?

I know I always imagine this young boy totally overwhelmed by big chain mail armor, or a lesson from Sunday School with Roman soldiers and I immediately can't connect. It's not my time, not my world, not my image. It also conjures up for me an adversarial spirit that just doesn't jibe with my faith stance.

IV. EXPLORE TOGETHER THIS WEEK

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?

“Love is the Way”—Bishop Curry's book is a great place to start, for we can be “armed with hope” together as a congregation as we read, explore and converse about this book together this fall.

We'll spend a few minutes sharing next Sunday and we consider together the armor of the Lord in these times—what we might need and what we are given, all around us.

For today—two metaphors have emerged for me this week as I pondered this passage. All the elements:

Belt, Breastplate, Shoes, Shield, Helmet, Sword:

Combine in my mind into a powerful, protective image: The Arms of God, which are Arms of Love—from God to us and us to then wrap around others. To hold and protect, to comfort and calm. Armor = Arms when they are arms of Love.

V. ARMS OF LOVE TO WRAP AND SHIELDS TO COVER ALL

A. Shield of Faith

The shield of faith is the perfect visual. The shields of the Roman army were one-and-a-half people wide. So when the army stood together there was no break in the line, because each person was holding a shield that covered themselves *and* their neighbor. As long as the whole body stands fast and holds the line together, everyone is shielded by the faith of others.

When our armor includes a shield that is one-and-a-half people wide, it's the perfect size! It fits! Not like Saul's metal tunic and whole suit of mail dragging poor young David into the ground. Not something designed for war and military battle, but for taking on the challenges of everyday life—like recovering from surgeries or falls, loss of loved ones or too much stress and heartache.

We come alongside one another, with our Shield of Faith & Fellowship held strong—by those who are strong at the moment—and it shields and protects those who need a helping hand, or a strong arm, or a driver or cook! Not everyone has to hold up the shield—that's the beauty of it!

Those who are able, please hold up a shield! Go together with someone else to combine your shields to cover and protect those who are down at the moment. Leave no gaps!

B. Arms of Love—Mama Bear God

As we shield one another, we form a kind of “Mama Bear” for one another, as God is a fierce mama bear protecting us. Even with social distancing in a pandemic, we can “send hugs”, and reach out and embrace one another in loving, comforting and protective ways with “Bear Hugs.”

As we listen to this song, imagine God wrapping you in a big bear hug, never letting go.

ARMS OF LOVE – Amy Grant

Lord, I'm really glad you're here.

I hope you feel the same when you see all my fear,
and how I fail.

I fall sometimes.

It's hard to walk in sinking sand.

I miss the rock, and find I've nowhere else to stand.

I start to cry.

Lord, please help me.

Raise my hands, so you can lift me up.

Hold me close, hold me tighter.

I have found a place where I can hide;

it's safe inside

your arms of love.

Like a child who's held throughout a storm;

I'm safe and warm

in your arms of love.

Storms may come and storms may go.

I wonder just how many storms it takes

until I finally know

you're here always.

Even when my skies are far from grey.

Let me stay, Lord, teach me to stay.

In the place I've found where I can hide;

it's safe inside

your arms of love.

Like a child who's held throughout a storm;

I'm safe and warm

in your arms of love.