

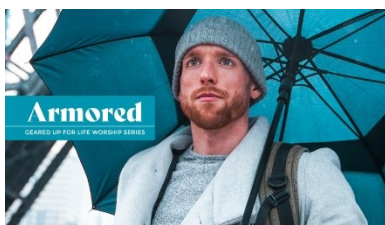
**"Armored"**

August 22, 2021

**Ephesians 6: 10-20**

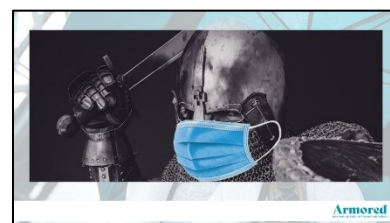
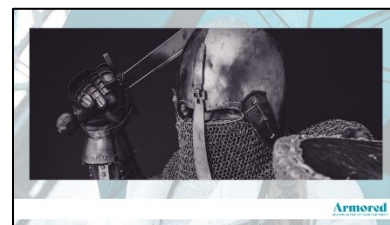
*<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. <sup>15</sup> As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

*<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.*



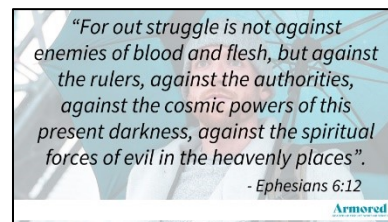
As Kristin read the passage and I dressed in this hodge-podge get-up, I hope that you were able to hear Paul's words concerning putting on the armor of God. As we delve into our passage from Ephesians 6, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Today's passage is the culmination of the "how to" that comes to us in the second half of the letter to the Ephesians. Paul wrote these words while under house arrest, a prisoner in Rome awaiting trial. Scholars believe that Paul wrote these words while a Roman soldier stood guard close by, unknowingly modeling his armor for Paul as he drew to a conclusion to his letter. The belt and breastplate, the shoes and the shield, the helmet and the sword – all parts of a Roman centurion's daily garb. When you thought about armor, perhaps at first something more like this knight came to mind for you. Today there are not many professions that require armor. Yes, soldiers and the police wear body armor and a hockey goalie suits up with a lot of protective gear. Our current pandemic has raised the way we think about and maybe even wear protective gear. Here is my rendition of a 21<sup>st</sup> century knight. While there is some intended humor here, the reality is that for many people a mask provides a layer of peace and protection. It is a simple way to protect ourselves in these days of disease and illness.

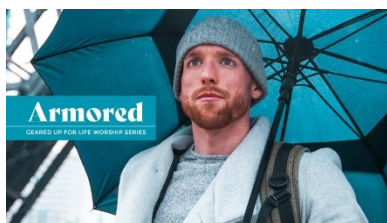


In our passage today, Paul is not speaking of physical armor but spiritual armor. If you are not there already, I invite you to turn with me to Ephesians 6, beginning in verse ten. Paul begins by encouraging us to be "*strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power*". Continuing he instructs us to put on the full armor of God so that we can "*stand against the wiles of the devil*". Returning to the idea that we spoke of two weeks ago, when Paul pleaded with us not to "*not make room for the devil*", today identifies our struggle as one that is spiritual in nature.

In verse twelve Paul writes, *"For our 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"*. Paul's final word to the churches in and



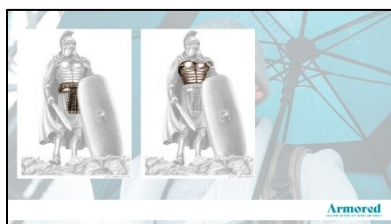
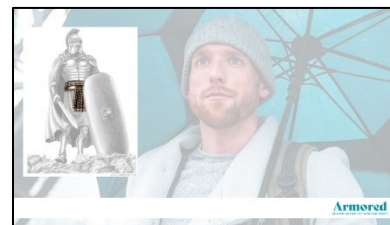
around Ephesus was to warn them about the devil's opposition to them and to urge them to protect themselves with all of God's armor. Satan is ever at work trying to separate us from God and from our faith. Satan's schemes are many – lies, doubt, deceit, envy, anxiety, half-truths, greed, gluttony, fear, jealousy, gossip, vanity – just to name a few. It is only when we put on the full armor of God that we have a chance to stand against all the strategies of the devil *"so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm"*. At times the challenge we deal with may appear to have a human face. But behind the anger or prejudice or whatever that is causing us difficulty is a lie or seed planted by the devil.



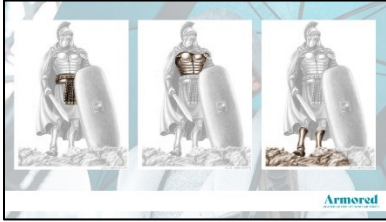
As we turn to verse fourteen, we get into the armor that Paul encourages us to wear. Most of the equipment that Paul suggests are to defend ourselves, not to attack

others. The focus is not on the exact function of the sword, for example, but on the gifts that God gives us that help us stand firm. Before we delve into the armor that Paul suggests in our passage today, we also must realize that these are not all the possible ways that we can rely on our faith to help us to stand firm against the evils of this world. In reality, we should use every accessory or piece of our faith to stand firm in this world. Paul's illustration is just the start of the ways that God's gifts can help us along on our journey of faith.

Paul begins with the belt of truth. In a practical sense, in Paul's day the belt was used by a warrior to gather in all the garments worn under the armor. Going into battle, you would not want a lot of loose flaps of clothing hanging out that your enemy could grab ahold of. There is also a metaphor here. With the encouragement to put on the belt of truth, we are reminded to be honest and truthful at all times, to always live by our faith. We should not have this half-truth or that lie hanging out there. The expression "gird up your loins" is one that comes from this idea. Paul is saying that speaking the truth keeps us from getting caught by the loose ends of our lies and half-truths. Belted in the truth, having decided to live honestly and openly for Christ, we need not worry about keeping everything straight. That is the difficulty with being dishonest – remembering what you said to whom and whom you said what to. A quote attributed to Abraham Lincoln echoes this. He is reported to have said, 'No one has a good enough memory to be a really effective liar'.

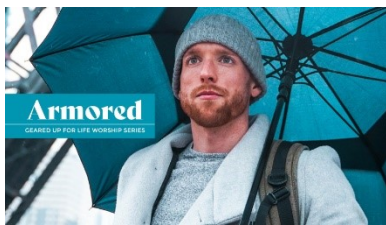


Next comes breastplate of righteousness. In the practical sense, a solid breastplate protected the vital organs. In our faith life, our most vital organ, of course, is our heart. Righteousness is being faithful in our relationships – both with God and with one another. God is always righteous, always keeping the divine side of the covenant. We try to be faithful, to live righteous lives. We work hard to keep in right relationship with our God, our spouse, our children, our coworkers, our teammates, our classmates, our neighbors, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We wear our righteousness like a breastplate so that we keep our heart safe and so that we are reminded to protect the hearts of those we love and interact with.



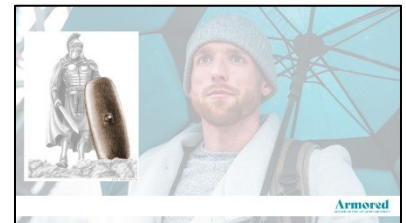
Next comes some good shoes. Shoes are made for walking, for getting to where the action is. For the Romans, good shoes were essential – they got you where you needed to go and got you there quickly.

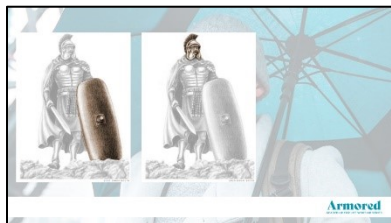
Today a good pair of shoes is not made for putting up on the coffee table or ottoman, for sitting back and waiting for someone to come ask us about the good news of Jesus Christ. A pair of good shoes is still for getting where the action is, for being out and about, looking for opportunities to serve others and to humbly share our faith in Christ, to *"proclaim the gospel of peace"*.



Next comes the umbrella. In a practical sense the umbrella keeps the rain off of us - this is a very useful piece of equipment when life tries to dump on us. An

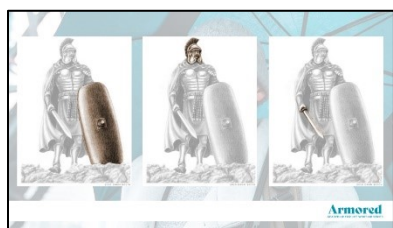
umbrella protects us from the rain and the sun. Sometimes in life the skies grow dark and the wind begins to howl around us. We need something to keep us from drowning in despair. Oh wait, Paul says we need the shield of faith. The shield of faith protects us from the flaming arrows of the evil one. When the questions of faith fall like rain, when tears of grief puddle up at our feet, when clouds of doubt rumble overhead, then we need to hold on tight to our faith. Hold onto the fact that we are a beloved child of God no matter what the world throws down at us or upon us, no matter what lies we hear whispered in our ears. Paul urges us to use our shield of faith to protect us and to keep us safe from the attacks of Satan.





Next comes the crowning glory – the helmet of salvation. Above all else, our salvation is the foundation of our faith. As believers we know that God has saved us and has given us eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Our salvation, like the rest of the armor, is something that we need to wear all of the time. Salvation is not something we keep in our pocket until the day that we stand before the Lord. It is not something that we pull out when we are in a pinch. Salvation is something that guides our every thought and action, that helps us to see the world through eyes of grace and mercy, something that enables us to understand the struggles of our brothers and sisters in need. Salvation is above all a gift of love – one that lets us see beyond the kingdom of this world and into the kingdom of God that makes space and welcomes all people as beloved and worthy, one that protects us from the blows of the enemy, the architect of evils such as prejudice and racism and injustice.

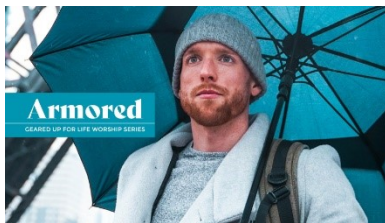


And, finally, my friends, the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. This is not a sword intended to hack away at the evils of the world, to attack darkness in whatever

forms they present themselves. This sword has a specific function. And it is a function that we do not always control. The sword that Paul writes of is the word of God. So, the sword is not about taking away life or limiting life. It is about giving life and helping others to understand the freedom that we find in Christ. We do not control the sword because the word of God is alive and active. The word of God comes to life when Spirit and soul come together. The words we speak when God is guiding the conversation are rarely our words.



In those moments of crisis, in those times of conflict, in those places where fear or doubt have seized the day – the words that come to us that bring calm and peace and patience and empathy and trust are words spoken into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, placed on our tongues by the divine. Our call is to be faithful, to know and study the word of God, to plant it like seeds in our hearts. To faithfully wield the sword of the Spirit requires a lifetime of study.



In our passage today, Paul encourages us to be “armored” – to put on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. Each of these aspects of faith help us to stand firm in our faith. Over the course of this worship series, “Geared Up for Life”, we have worked our way through Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. The first half of the letter covered the “why” of our faith – setting our hope on Christ, finding our peace in Christ, and living rooted and grounded in the love of Christ. The second half covered the “how to” of our faith – how to live a life worthy of our calling, how to speak the truth in love, how to live a life of thanksgiving, and, today, how to put on the whole armor of God. Overall, the letter to the Ephesians is one of encouragement and practical advice on living well as the community of faith. To live well, to represent Christ and our faith well in the world, is both an individual and a community effort. With faith in the Holy Spirit’s guidance and direction, we strive to live as faithful disciples seeking to transform the world, to bring God’s kingdom here to earth. To illustrate how both faithful individuals and faithful congregations can together be a part of building God’s kingdom here on earth, I close with this true story. A missionary home on furlough told this true story while visiting his home church.

*"While serving at a small field hospital in Africa, every two weeks I traveled by bicycle through the jungle to the nearest large city for supplies. This was a journey of two days and required camping overnight at the halfway point in the jungle. On one of these trips, just as I arrived in the city, I saw two men fighting, one of whom had been injured. As a missionary doctor I intervened and treated his injuries. At the same time, I talked to him about the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Afterwards I went about my planned tasks – collecting money from a bank, purchasing medicine and supplies. Then I began my two-day journey back to the field hospital. Halfway back, I camped overnight as usual, then arrived home without incident. Two weeks later I repeated my trip. Upon arriving in the city, I was met by the young man I had treated. He told me that it was known that I regularly carried money and medicines. He said, 'Two weeks ago several of us followed you back into the jungle, knowing that you would camp overnight. We planned to kill you and take everything. But just as we were about to come into your camp, we saw that you were surrounded by 26 armed guards. So, we left.'*

*At this I laughed to myself and said that I was certainly all alone out in that jungle campsite. The young man wouldn't accept my word, though. He said, 'No sir. I was not the only one to see the guards. There were six of us who saw them, and we all counted them. It was because of those 26 guards that we were afraid and left you alone.'*

*As the missionary was telling this story one of the men of the congregation jumped to his feet and asked if the missionary could tell him the exact date this had happened. The missionary told him the date and the man then told him this story: 'On the night of your incident in Africa, it was morning here and I was preparing to go play golf. But for some reason I felt a very strong urge to pray*



*for you. In fact, the urging was so strong that I called men in this church to meet with me here in the sanctuary to pray for you. Would all of those men who met with me on that day please stand up?’*

*The men who had met together to pray that day stood up. As the missionary looked around the room at those who were standing, he wasn't so concerned with who they were – he was too busy counting how many they were. There were 26 men standing”.*

When faithful individuals and faithful communities of faith walk together through life – humbly serving the God they love, modeling the Jesus they follow, and leaning into the voice and listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit – the kingdom of God will be built, the powers of darkness will not prevail. As we go forth from this time and place may we each seek to be faithful in our walk, striving to build the kingdom of God in all the ways we can, at all the times we can, and with all the people we can.

As I close, receive these words of Paul as a blessing and encouragement for your journey as a disciple of Christ. I pray that these words would guide and strengthen you and your faith. May Paul’s words be our words: *"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, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak”.* May it be so for you and for me as we boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen and amen.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. During your journey of faith, which pieces of 'armor' have best suited you in your times of need? How could you share this story as a means to encourage others on their journey of faith?
- 2) *Pray*. Where in your life (or in the lives of those you love) is the power of the Holy Spirit needed? Who can you ask to pray with you this week?
- 3) *Study*. Read Isaiah 59: 15b-21. How do these words of the prophet add power and validity to Paul's passage from Ephesians 6 and the word that God spoke to you today?