

August 29, 2021 Pentecost 14B

Ephesians 6:10-20

Dress Like a Christian

The Armor of God—that's the subject today. Paul describes it in Ephesians 6:

*Stand firm then, with the **belt of truth** buckled around your waist, with the **breastplate of righteousness** in place, ¹⁵ and with your **feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace**. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the **shield of faith**, with which you can extinguish 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. ~Ephesians 6:14-17*

I want to start out by telling you that while I have taught on this chapter a lot in Bible class, this is the first time I have preached on the armor of God since August of 1994—27 years ago. It was the first sermon in my vicarage congregation. Vicarage is like an internship. It is done your third year of training to become a pastor before you go back to seminary for the final year of school. A vicar serves in a church under a pastor and does everything a pastor does, but under the pastor's supervision. I did my vicarage in Waterford, Wisconsin. I got there in August and was assigned my first sermon and I worked on that Armor of God sermon for hours and hours and I expected great results. The new vicar was going to wow them and knock it out of the park.

I should tell you that when I was a young boy, my grandfather worked in a western wear store selling cowboy hats and boots and western wear and saddles and supplies for people who worked with horses. So I had a lot of cowboy clothes as a little guy. Also when I was in high school, the western craze started and cowboy clothes became very popular (I had long outgrown all mine). And a lot of non-cowboy types were wearing cowboy clothes.

Now all those cowboy clothes had a purpose. And I knew what the purposes were. The wide brimmed hats provided protection from the sun. The bandana around their necks protected them from dust and sand in very dry environment. The boots protected them from snake bite. The fringe on jackets caused the rain to run off. The leather chaps protected

them from thistles and thorns when they were chasing cattle through the brush. And I used all this information in my sermon that day 27 years ago in great detail. And I made the point that during the western wear craze, when people dressed up in all this stuff but never used it for its intended purpose, they just looked silly. And then I went through the armor of God in great detail and made the point that when Christians dress up in all this armor and spend all our time polishing it or using it to fight each other, we just look silly. I finished up my first sermon with full certainty that everyone's life had been changed, that everyone had a full understanding of the armor of God and would no doubt be using it appropriately from then on (seminary students and especially brand new vicars are a bit naïve and idealistic).

So church was over and I processed to the rear of the church to accept my praises and accolades. Well, they were lackluster at best. Finally, a dear lady named Vera Schrank came through the line and said, "Vicar, I have never learned so much in a sermon." My face beamed. I had taught someone about the full armor of God. Now she knew about the belt of truth and shield of faith, and breastplate of righteousness. My first sermon was a success... until she continued, "Yes, I didn't know all that stuff about cowboys." My heart sank. A lesson in humility.

I don't want to teach you about cowboys today. I want to teach you about the armor of God that is yours because of the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus. More than that, I want you clothed in it and putting it to use (and that may well be the longest introduction to a sermon ever). So quickly:

*Stand firm then, with the **belt of truth** buckled around your waist,*

In Roman armor, the belt didn't keep your pants up. The belt held the rest of the armor in place. That's what God's truth does for us. It keeps everything else in place.

*with the **breastplate of righteousness** in place,*

The breastplate covered the soldier's vital organs. That is what God's righteousness does for us. We are, as the song says, covered over in the

righteousness of Christ. Our sinful hearts are covered. Covered in righteousness.

*and with your **feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.***

Remember what Isaiah says about feet: "*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" ~Isaiah 52:7*

We are a people with a message, an urgent message. We are a people who are told to go, even hurry. So God equips our feet with readiness—a readiness that comes from having that same Good News applied to our lives.

*¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the **shield of faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

The shield was a movable defensive weapon which the soldier could move around to fend off attacks from any side. That is what faith does for us. We take that faith in Jesus and we use it to fend off every lie, every doubt, every guilty condemnation the devil throws at us. We have a great hymn that says:

*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!*

That's what the shield of faith does.

*¹⁷ Take the **helmet of salvation***

The helmet covered the soldier's most vulnerable area—his head. That's what salvation does for us. No matter what vulnerabilities we have, we are saved by Jesus.

*and the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God.*

Our only offensive weapon is the word of God. The word of God is what equips us and empowers us and allows us to fight back. So we become as

adept at it as we possibly can. We spend time studying it, using it, applying it.

But let's be clear about what the fight is. That point from my vicarage sermon remains unchanged. God didn't give us armor to fight each other or to sit around polishing it all the time. It's for use against evil. Let's back up a few verses:

"Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." ~ Ephesians 6:11-12.

Look around the room today. Or if you are worshipping online, look out your window at your neighbors. The people you see are not your enemy. You don't need armor for them. And the other churches in our neighborhood are not our enemies. We don't need our armor for them. No human is our enemy. "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood," says Paul.

Our struggle is against evil. It's against forces that oppose God. It's against those things that stand against God and want to bring about things God doesn't want.

God wants all people to be saved. Anything that gets in the way of that is evil. So we armor up and fight it. God wants all people to be loved. Anything that gets in the way of that is evil. So we armor up and fight it. God want all people to have peace and justice and freedom. Anything that gets in the way of that is evil. So we armor up and fight it.

So people loved by God, *put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray...*

Let's pray.