

The Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost
September 13, 2009
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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. Therefore 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 in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. (NIV)

Are you ready for some football? The first full day of NFL games start today and soon players will be getting ready. Whether you are a football fan or not, watch a lot of games, very few, or none; I'm sure all of you can understand why a football player dresses this way. In fact, a player will be wearing equipment from head to toe. They will have on a helmet, a mouth guard, a girdle, pads to protect their shoulders, legs, and thighs, and shoes with spikes for their feet. Why does a player put on all this equipment? Why don't you see players without it? Because football is a vicious contest. Teams attack one another and throughout the game there are violent collisions. Imagine one player on the football field without any equipment against these big, fast, strong athletes. There would be certain injury and possible death. You would have to be a fool to play in the NFL without any protection.

Dear friends, we are in a contest far more dangerous. We are facing enemies out to attack us. They not only *want* to injure us, but their goal is to devour us - eternally. That's what will surely happen if we would decide we do not need the equipment our loving Lord gives us to wear. Trying to survive without the protection and strength of our God would be worse than getting onto the middle of an NFL field without any helmet or pads. So I pray we listen and listen well this morning as the apostle Paul gives us this encouragement to: **Stand firm in the Lord's mighty power. There are strong, evil enemies scheming against us. Our God gives us full armor.**

Before Paul signs off on this wonderful letter to the church in Ephesus the Holy Spirit leads him to write one more thing. "*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.*" Paul wants the people to be strengthened by God and stand safely in His mighty power. He wants them to wear the equipment God provides. Why? "*So that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.*" We have an enemy that is scheming against us. Paul goes on to talk about "*our struggle.*" Literally, the Greek word is that

of a hand to hand contest or fight. It was a word used to describe a wrestling contest. It is one thing if we could see and size up our opponent but listen to the description of our enemies: ***“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.”***

The devil and his companions are powerful and crafty. They are organized and evil. They have one goal in mind - to defeat you - to destroy you - to devour your faith in Jesus and pull you away from God. They are real. They are ***“the powers of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil”*** out there in the heavenly realms scheming to take you out. They want to lead you to pride so that you start to think you deserve God apart from Jesus. They want to lead you to despair so that you will give up on God. They will use money or sex or power or fame. They will use friends or family. They will use enemies and tragedy and sickness, or success and prosperity. They will look for any weak spot they can find.

These enemies of ours will also pick their spots. Paul talks about ***“when the day of evil comes.”*** They are wise enough to try to go after you at the most opportune times. Just when you might be prone to temptation, or despair, or pride, or overwhelming guilt, they will sling their flaming arrows. When you are sad, or weak, or vulnerable they will be ready to attack. Of this we can be sure - there will be times in our lives when day of evil will come. We have enemies that won't hesitate to hit us below the belt. They will do anything in their craftiness to pull us away from God. We have strong, evil enemies scheming against us - our struggle is against them. It is no wonder Paul concludes this letter saying: ***“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”***

For we have a Lord who is much stronger than the devil and his evil angels. We have a mighty God on our side and with Him on our side no one can stand against us. We have a God who gives us full armor. Dear friends, it is equipment that is second to none! ***“Therefore 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.”***

From head to toe God equips us to take our stand against the devil's schemes. He gives us the truth of His Word which exposes all the devil's lies. Without truth, like a belt around our waist, the whole armor would fall apart. He gives the breastplate of righteousness to cover our hearts - the righteousness that comes from Jesus. So when the devil points to our sin and tells us the situation is hopeless, we are able to point to the perfect life Jesus lived for us and know we are right with God. God fits our feet so they are ready to march into battle knowing Jesus has won our victory. On the cross Jesus died to take away our sin and we are forgiven. We have peace. We are ready to march with a message of peace to tell others. We also have another gift from God - the gift of faith that serves as a big shield against the temptations and doubts the devil fires our way. And God fits our head with a helmet - not with a big G on it, but one that says salvation. We have heaven. No matter what the world and devil throw at us that is our living hope - our sure hope based on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And finally God gives us

a sword - a powerful weapon. It is the sword of the Spirit which makes us the ones on the attack. This sword is the powerful, living & active, life-giving Word of God.

Our great and powerful, loving Lord gives us full armor. Notice that twice we are told to put on this armor and not just some of it - but the *full* armor of God. What if a football player had everything on except his helmet or everything on except his shoes? Not good. Even more so God wants us to be protected head to toe from the evil one. He wants us to be ready when the day of evil comes. He wants us prepared. So next week we start another year of the regular schedule of Sunday School and Bible Study. I am not going to stand here and demand you have to be there. But I will ask you to do this - read these verses again and meditate on them this week and then ask yourselves some questions. How important is Bible study? How necessary is it for me to grow in God's word and truth? What dangers are out there if I still have some pieces missing in the armor? Read these verses. Recognize our struggle and the answer becomes pretty obvious. ***"Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."***

Not only does the Lord want us to stand in His power by remaining in Word and Sacrament, but the Lord also gives us another great blessing in our struggle. The privilege of prayer. Paul writes: ***"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."*** Pray for your fellow believers. Pray for your children. Pray for all the saints on all occasions that none of us fall into the devil's traps. Pray always, and especially when you know a fellow brother or sister in Christ is weak and vulnerable and going through a rough time. Pray that they be ready on the day that evil comes.

And then Paul concludes: ***"Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."*** As your pastor I ask for the same thing. Please pray for me that I may teach and preach the Word. Pray that I may clearly proclaim the good news that Jesus is our Savior. Think of what the devils could accomplish if they take out the pastor. You can bet they will be working to do just that so I ask for your prayers that God keeps putting the full armor on me.

Facing the devil and his evil armies alone would be just as foolish as playing an NFL football game without any equipment on at all. But our struggle is against enemies that we can't even see - against forces of evil that are powerful and cunning. There are evil angels constantly scheming against us. But we have a Lord who readies us for the vicious contest. We have a Savior who came and undid the devil's work by winning our salvation on Calvary's hill. He proclaims complete victory by pointing us to the scoreboard which reads His tomb is empty. He gives us full armor so that we can stand until the day when our tombs are also empty and our eternal victory is secure. How great it is to know that we do not ever have to stand alone! Instead, may we today and everyday ***"be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."*** It is in His power that we have and we will continue to stand firm. It is game on. Amen.

