

**The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
September 6, 2015  
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)***

Take a moment and think about the devil. What picture appears in your mind? Do we think of the devil as kind of a cartoon character like this? (1st pic) We see the devil as this guy with horns and a pitchfork. Perhaps we even joke around like calling a kid “a little devil” when that kid does something wrong that makes us laugh. Then we picture the devil as more mischievous than dangerous. Or perhaps our minds went immediately to a different picture like this? (2<sup>nd</sup> pic) We see the devil as very frightening and dangerous. Just thinking about the devil takes us back to one of those horror movies that left us sleeping with a light on for weeks. We picture the devil as someone to fear. Did any of you picture the devil like this? (3<sup>rd</sup> pic) Do we ever forget that the devil might try to use those closest to us to destroy us? Remember how, when the apostle Peter tried to get Jesus to avoid the road that led to the cross, Jesus quickly replied: “*Get behind me Satan!*”

When we are asked to picture the devil perhaps some of us go back to the Garden of Eden? (4<sup>th</sup> pic) How can this picture not come to mind? The devil took on the form of a serpent and deceived Adam and Eve with his lies asking: “*Did God really say?*” Or maybe just maybe when it comes to the devil our minds are more like this last picture. (5<sup>th</sup> pic) We don’t think about the devil at all. In fact, one of the devil’s greatest tricks today is to get people to believe that he is not real. I was talking to one person once who said: “*I can handle much of what the Bible says but that whole devil thing I just don’t buy it. I just can’t believe there is a devil out there trying to get me.*”

So today we want to, as we always do, hear what God has to say about this subject. God tells us clearly to: “***Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.***” The Lord allows our eyes to be open here to what is going on behind the scenes where we see the devil is very real. “***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.***” I pray we

recognize the seriousness of the struggle we are in and take this warning to heart. I pray we watch and pray so that we do not fall into temptation. But most of all I pray we walk away today not in fear and despair, but in confidence, comfort, and joy to know that God has provided us with: **Full Armor for a Fierce Fight!**

It is always a big mistake to underestimate the opposition. It doesn't matter if it is a game or in life, if you don't take the enemy seriously you are setting yourself up for a fall. God wants us to know this full well when it comes to our spiritual enemies. Paul writes that our real struggle is not against flesh and blood. Our actual fight is not against the physical. There are real spiritual forces of evil all around us, "**rulers, authorities, powers,**" that want to take us out and bring us down. Satan, along with many other demons, is constantly scheming against us. Do we realize this? Do you recognize that spiritual speaking you are living in the middle of Afghanistan surrounded by enemies every day? Do we recognize there are real snipers out there we don't see ready to take fire at us? God wants to open your eyes here to see this struggle? The Lord wants to open my eyes to see that I am in a fierce fight.

This is why Paul now writes, "**therefore.**" ***"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."***

Again don't you see in this the seriousness of the struggle and the fierceness of the fight! For example if you were in the army and your general had a mission for you and said: "*you may or may not want to bring your gun.*" You probably would think it wasn't that big of a deal. But if your commander said: "*Put on all your gear and grab all the weapons.*" Imagine what you are thinking as you put on your bullet proof uniform, and boots, and helmet, and grab your gun. You know you are in for a fight.

So what are you thinking, my friends, when your God tells you to put on the full armor? I was recently gathered with a group of pastor's and this text came up and the question was asked if these words of God are intended to be primarily a warning or a comfort. Most agreed they tended to see them as a warning. Yet, dear friends, I hope you also see here the comfort the Lord has for you. Don't we find comfort in the very fact that God gives us full armor!

Remember where the apostle Paul was when he wrote this letter. He was in Rome at the time and the book of Acts informs us he was under a kind of house arrest "***with a soldier to guard him.***" (Acts 28) I picture Paul, as he writes these words to His fellow believers, looking at that Romans soldier (Roman soldiers had the best equipment in the world) and thinking about the awesome God has given to us for this fierce fight. We have a belt of truth. To cover all our important inner organs God has positioned the breastplate of righteousness. Our feet have been fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. We have been given the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation has been placed upon our heads. In our hands we hold the powerful sword of the Spirit. Without getting into much detail about every piece let's just say that God has provided us with full armor! God has equipped us with everything we need for this fierce fight.

And may we never forget that this armor God gives us to prepare us for battle was

already worn by His Son. Jesus Christ put on the full armor of God and He took His stand against all of the devil's schemes. Read again though those temptations Christ faced in the wilderness and see how your Savior stood firm using God's Word. Recall how in Gethsemane Jesus followed His own advice which the disciples did not; Jesus watched and prayed so that He did not fall into temptation. Realize why the armor is battered, beaten up, and stained in blood because that is how Jesus won the greatest victory over the devil. Jesus crushed Satan when He gave His life up on the cross to pay for all our sins and bring us back to God. Jesus destroyed him "who hold the power of death – that is, the devil - and freed all those who were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2) by proving it was truly finished when Jesus rose from His grave. Jesus doesn't just give us armor for the fight; Jesus already wore it and won the war for us.

Now Jesus is with us as we take our stand against the devil's schemes. Jesus gives us His Word and Sacraments so that we might stand firm. So do you feel the need to put on the full armor God has for us? Martin Luther said this about the Lord's Supper but I think it applies well here to our need for the full armor of God. He said if you feel like you no longer need the Lord's Supper you should do three things. First pinch yourself – see if you are still flesh and blood. Then remember how sinful that flesh is and how we all have by nature the heart, as Jesus talks about in our Gospel, from which comes every evil. Second Luther says to turn to your neighbor and ask if you are still in the world. If you are then you will be under constant attacks from its desires and temptations. And third Luther says to close your eyes and picture Satan and his army aiming at you with flaming arrows. Do these 3 things, Luther says, and you might even be a bit hasty about making your way up to this altar for the Sacrament!

It doesn't really matter what the devil looks like. What matters is Satan is real and as dangerous as a roaring lion. What matters is to understand there are spiritual forces of evil we don't even see scheming against us. It is no wonder Paul tells us to put God's armor on. Can't we understand now why Paul tells them and us to keep praying "***on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests?***" The fight is fierce! We have powerful enemies, enemies we don't stand a chance against on our own. But, thanks be to God, we don't have to stand on our own! In fact, God gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! That's why Paul writes, "***Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.***" God have given to us full armor for the fierce fight! I pray we put it on every day. Amen.