

## **Ephesians 6:10-20**

<sup>10</sup>Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil. <sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup>For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup>Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place, <sup>15</sup>and with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals. <sup>16</sup>At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. <sup>17</sup>Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

<sup>18</sup>At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints. <sup>19</sup>Pray for me also, that when I open my mouth a message will be given to me that boldly reveals the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup>for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may speak about it boldly, as it is necessary for me to speak.

## **Stand**

### **I.**

Stand. How hard can it be?

Perhaps you wouldn't ask that question if you ever stood on the parade ground of a military installation waiting for a visiting dignitary. Since you have to be there to come to attention when that individual arrives, the unit must get there early. Standing at parade-rest you wait until the arrival is imminent. The unit is called to attention long before the dignitary passes your location. Once called to attention, the fly buzzing around your head can't even be acknowledged. The knees must be bent ever so slightly so you don't begin to sway back and forth or, worse yet, pass out. Just stand. Don't move.

Stand. How hard can it be?

Perhaps you wouldn't ask that question if you had been with the reporter sent out to document the arrival of a hurricane. Spray hits the face like a million tiny missiles driving into the skin. A hand desperately clutches the microphone as if, somehow, it can keep them from staggering as the wind buffets them as if they were a cardboard cutout. Gasping for breath the reporter has to shout into the microphone to be heard above the howls. How many viewers consider the fate of the camera operator who must struggle to hold the camera steady throughout the entire process?

### **II.**

Stand. How hard can it be?

Every day there are struggles to stand, not just on a military parade ground or documenting the latest storm.

Many aren't asking such monumental questions about life. They are just facing a struggle to stand in things that affect people every day. How can I make the paycheck stretch just a little farther? What health care decisions are best for me and my family in the face of cancer, or even concerning vaccines? What is the best way to deal with my depression or my anxiety?

### III.

Stand. How hard can it be?

Impossible. That's how hard. "Stand against the schemes of the Devil. <sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:11-12, EHV). Life challenges are hard enough—depression, anxiety, health problems. It's hard enough when you have enemies who slander you or threaten you with bodily harm.

But the struggle to stand is not just against flesh and blood. The struggle against rulers and authorities may take on a whole new meaning to you lately. Lockdowns are still fresh in our memories. Mandates and threats and demands that you take certain medical actions, whether you have valid concerns or not. Are your concerns unfounded? Can you trust what you have been told and are being told? Perhaps you find it a struggle to know what to do and when to do it and how to do it.

But that's not the real problem here, either. The *real* struggle is against the *spiritual* forces of evil. The *real* struggle is against the schemes of the Devil. He doesn't really care about your bills or your medical decisions or your depression. Except from this perspective: he'll happily use *any* of those things to attack your soul. The devil wants to rip your faith right out of your heart. He will take any and all of those challenges and those struggles and magnify them until you believe escape is impossible. In Luther's famous "Mighty Fortress" hymn he said of the Devil: "On earth is not his equal."

You can't stand.

### IV.

Paul uses the word "stand" repeatedly in this reading. There is a key to standing. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand" (Ephesians 6:10-11, EHV). The key to standing is the full armor of God. Miss a piece and the results are devastating.

"Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place, <sup>15</sup> ... <sup>16</sup>At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. <sup>17</sup>Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:14-17, EHV).

Paul lists many parts of armor. There's a belt at your waist—a big, wide belt that protects your mid-section. He names it the belt of truth. God's truth protects against Satan's lies. There's the breastplate of righteousness. Knowing of Jesus' forgiveness is to be a comfort to you when Satan comes right at you, brandishing the sins of your past in your face.

There's the shield of faith. The Roman shield was a piece 4 feet high and 2.5 feet wide. You could duck behind it when attacked, but also poke your helmeted head above the shield to survey the battlefield. Faith is your shield against the attacks of the devil.

There's the helmet of salvation. Jesus won salvation for you on the cross. Wearing that helmet you can hold up your head in confidence. Jesus has given his all for you.

Finally, there's the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. In Luther's hymn he said about our battle with Satan: "one little word can fell him." The one piece of offensive firepower you have in God's armor is the word of God. So powerful it is that one word from God can drop Satan to his knees.

After last week's sermon, you probably noticed the ellipsis in the quote put up on the screen. We skipped right over one verse. In a sense, it's the key to this whole set of armor

Paul describes. In his famous hymn Luther said of Satan: “on *earth* is not his equal.” We need the missing verse. “[Stand] with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals” (Ephesians 6:15, EHV).

Perhaps you noticed me walking around this morning before service with my odd choice of footwear. Maybe you noticed them under my robe. Boots, especially worn in the way military personnel wear them, are an unusual choice for a pastor at a worship service.

Military personnel wear shoes that help them retain their footing. The right footwear help to stand at attention while you wait for the visiting dignitary, or to maintain a solid stance in order to carry out the mission.

The right footwear to withstand the buffeting winds of Satan’s attacks and the million tiny darts he hurls at you relentlessly is the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. It seems such a paradox, doesn’t it? The gospel of *peace* gives us solid footing for battle. Remember that real peace is peace with God. The gospel of peace is the solid footing we have in knowing Jesus has won our salvation. We stand firmly before God “having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but ... holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:27, EHV), as Paul said in last week’s reading.

Satan’s relentless attacks cannot move us with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace as our footwear.

## V.

Stand. How hard can it be?

Not impossible with the full armor of God. That doesn’t mean God promises you an easy task, however, not even *with* the full armor he provides.

“At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18, EHV). Pray that the Lord would continually be with you as you stand. Remember also that it isn’t just about *you*. Pray for all the saints—that is, for all believers—that *they* might continue to stand steadfast and unmoved and unmovable against Satan, even as you pray he would help you to do.

“Pray for me also, that when I open my mouth a message will be given to me that boldly reveals the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup>for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may speak about it boldly, as it is necessary for me to speak” (Ephesians 6:19-20, EHV). Paul asks that the people pray for him to be bold to speak about Jesus. Pray that *all* ambassadors for the gospel would have boldness to proclaim the gospel of peace. Pray that you would have the courage and conviction to do the same if and/or when adversity directed at Christians comes to your own shores.

Look back through this reading about the armor of God in the days and weeks to come. As you continue to take your stand for the gospel and against Satan and his spiritual forces of evil don’t neglect *any* of the pieces of armor God has given you to take your stand. A soldier would find it difficult to complete the mission without *all* the necessary equipment. It might be easy to focus on what you think are the more flashy pieces and neglect the footwear. Don’t do it. Use the gospel of peace. Pray that the Holy Spirit would give you the power to speak that gospel and to live that gospel and to stand in that gospel as you live your life of faith. Amen.