**Written Copy Ephesians 6:10-13 Standing Firm in His Armor**

Pentecost 15 Proper 17

Sunday September 2nd, 2018

**Text: Ephesians 6:10-13**

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

10 From now on begin to be empowered in the Lord and in the exerted force of His power to overcome and have dominion over all things. 11 Let yourself be clothed (put on) the complete armor of God with His exerted force to empower you to stand in view of the organized scheming evil activities of the devil; 12 because this is not to us a wrestling match against flesh and blood, but with the elemental ruling forces, with those who have been delegated authority, with the demonic who assert their rule against God in this (present) darkness, with the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly realms. 13 For this reason you must take up the complete armor of God, so that you may be empowered (given the power) to take a stand against (resist/oppose) in the day of evil opposition and having accomplished all things to stand (resist).

**Exegetical Statement (the text’s context)**

Paul has been describing what it means to live as a Christian in the world but not of the world. He describes Christ’s relationship to the Church as our model for living with one another in the vocations of marriage, family, and work. But living in this way will bring opposition. Therefore we need to rely not on ourselves and our physical strength, our mental capacity, or our own strength of spirit. Instead we are to be strong in the LORD, the strength that He provides by faith that comes through Baptism, earned by Christ and given to us. We must have His strength because the fight is not in the temporal realm but the spiritual realm where we are ill equipped to do battle. Christ provides all the armor and weaponry needed. The belt that keeps it all in place and prepares us for the onslaught is the truth revealed about who Christ is and what He has done: that He is our Savior who rules over all things temporal and spiritual. He provides the breastplate of righteousness which is His righteousness won by His perfect life and given to us so that we are right with God regardless of our own performance. We stand firmly on the Gospel that declares what Christ has done to give us peace with God and therefore peace with each other. The Shield of faith protects against the devil’s accusations and lies as we hold to the truth of the Gospel despite what he might accuse us of. The helmet of Salvation keeps me grounded in the true doctrine that Salvation is the free gift from God and is not based on my works, and that by grace through faith all my sin is forgiven; even those things the devil accuses me of day and night.

**Focus Statement:**

Christ has defeated our greatest enemies: sin, death, and the devil. He gives to us the weapons we need to stand against the devil’s attacks. These are His gift, His weapons and the power to stand in them comes from Him alone. The belt that holds everything together and prepares us to stand is the truth of who Christ is and what He has done as true God and true man. He rules all, and is in control, even of Satan and his demons. The victory has been won and is assured. The breastplate of righteousness is my passive righteousness I have from Him that declares I’m right with God by what Christ has done, not by my own performance. The Gospel Message is the foundation for me to stand on because it assures me that all has already been done to bring me peace with God assure my place in the winners circle of eternal life. The full body shield of faith holds fast to Christ’s promises and declarations of forgiveness despite all the accusations that the devil uses to make me think I can’t be forgiven. The helmet of salvation is the truth of Scripture that counters the false logic I hold as a human and the misinformation and lies the devil tries to feed me to separate me from faith alone by grace alone. The sword is the only weapon Christ needs as He fights and wins for me; it’s the truth the devil can’t stand and doesn’t want me to hear. Christ renews my strength on all these through His gifts in Word and Sacrament

**Function Statement:**

**Why it’s important to know**:

When we think about the battles and attacks Christians face as we live in the sinful world we think in terms of temporal battles with flesh and blood and human instruments of warfare. We sing “Onward Christian Soldiers” with the view of the Crusades where soldiers carrying a cross slaughtered others in the name of Jesus. But the battles we face are in the spirit realm and we by ourselves have no weapons in which to engage the enemy, no power to fight him off, and no hope of winning against Satan’s organized and successful attack strategies.

**What the hearer should do as a result**:

Use the means given to me by Jesus through Baptism to remain strong in my faith that is based on all Christ has done, is doing, and will do in my life. I see the battle as against the devil who sometimes uses misguided and lost men to fight against me. Instead of engaging them in battle I use the Sword of the Spirit to try to save them from the devil’s clutches.

**Subject Sentence: Christ’s power to stand against the devil**

 I’ve just about finished watching on Neflix Ken Burn’s documentary on World War II. When I do finish I’ll consider it an accomplishment, since I haven’t finished another of his documentaries on the Civil War. Back in Elementary School and High School I don’t remember studying either of these subjects in much depth. Then again, I wasn’t all that interested in history; not like I am now. I’ve come to believe the maxim that those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it. Now I’d like to blame a busy schedule for not being able to finish watching them. And things have been busy as of late: a wedding, a funeral, more than a few hospital visits. But there is something else that has contributed to it. I found that watching them often left me with a sense of despair and hopelessness. Even though I knew that the Allied Army prevails in the end watching the casualties inflicted by the German Army who surprised the Allies who thought they could have some R &R time hidden away in the Ardennes Forest at the Battle of the Bulge, the American who lost their lives on the beach at Okinawa as their tanks and equipment sunk in the sand, the brutal fighting necessary to take Iwo Jima and root out the Japanese army from there series of tunnels where they hid, refusing to surrender but willing to fight to the death. Not to mention the pictures of American POW’s starving to death in that camp at Santo Thomas in the Philippines. The hopelessness of these moments seemed to overwhelm me even though I knew the end result was Victory for the American and Allied Armies.

Given the subject matter of our Epistle Lesson I considered having us sing “Onward Christian Soldiers marching as to war. With the cross of Jesus going on before.” But I decided against it because I thought it might communicate the wrong message. Not that there is anything wrong with the hymn-there’s not. It’s just how we Americans tend to see it in light of our history with the war’s we’ve fought. We confuse the battles we’ve had to fight as a nation with the spiritual warfare that this hymn and our text is addressing. I know of people from my Field Work congregation who might like to use this hymn as the battle for the Church to mount an attack on the Muslim Congregations in the area and drive them out. It’s the same attitude that moved kings and knights to mount the Crusades to free the Holy Land from Muslim control through war and death and slaughter all “with the cross of Jesus going on before.”

But Paul is very clear that the warfare he has in mind is a very different kind. As he writes in **verse 12 “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places**.” We are not fighting against other men, adversaries that can be dealt with like the Germans or the Japanese or the Muslims. We are fighting against the spiritual forces of evil. Against the devil and his demons. And while the battle can spill over and affect things in the earthly temporal realm, the real battle takes place in the spiritual realm. In the earthly realm the worst loss we can sustain is our life, at which time we go to be with Jesus and we win. But in the spiritual realm what’s being fought over is your eternal soul. The devil wants to tear you away from Christ and your faith in Him. He fights in ways that we don’t always realize or understand. Methods and tactics that we are, by ourselves, ill prepared to defend against. He and his demons are stronger, smarter, and more cunning than you or I. Since the time of the fall he’s been observing us, what makes us tick and what draws us into sin, as well as what can draw us away from God.

Paul describes the devil’s method of attack as being like fiery darts, javelins that are lit at the end so that when they hit they not only pierce and draw blood but the sting and burn with fire afterwards. These can come in the form of accusations. Such as might come about in the life of someone like Jim. Jim was a happily married man until he got a little too close to a co-worker who was also married. When the affair was discovered both families were devastated. Jim confessed his sin before God, his pastor, and his wife. But she was too hurt by this breach of trust to forgive him and filed for divorce. There former friends sided with Jim’s wife and wanted nothing more to do with him. His friends at Church shunned him as well seeing him as tainted goods. Jim carried on his back the pain he put his family and friends through as well as the pain he caused in his co-worker’s family. The devil’s fiery darts were the whispered suggestions that if Jim’s family, friends and brothers in Christ could not forgive him, could God really forgive him? The answer Jim came to believe was seen when in the pit of despair he took his own life.

Sheila was a proud person who relished in always being right. The Church board she was a part of had to deal with a tough issue and there were many heated discussions. Sheila began to take the disagreements on issues as personal attacks on her ability and her character. She especially took issue with Linda who always seemed to see problems with the plans and ideas Sheila wanted to initiate. The fact that other board members seemed to listen to Linda and agree with her angered Sheila. So after one board meeting Sheila asked to meet with Linda privately to get her opinion on something before bringing it to the board. Behind closed doors and with everyone gone Sheila lit into Linda and gave her a piece of her mind. She told Linda that she could either quit the board or Sheila would work to have her removed. She reminded Linda of the influence she carried as a long time Church member who was also a very generous giver. Linda quit the board and also quit coming to Church. The voice she heard that was a fiery dart from the devil convinced her that the Church was full of Sheila’s and she would be better off worshiping at home in her own way. After all she had her Bible and she could pray out on the deck. But then as time went by another of those fiery darts showed her all the fun things she could be doing on Sunday morning instead of worshipping by herself. And after all that TV preacher said that Jesus wants us to be happy. Without even realizing it she drifted away from the Church and he faith.

As for Sheila, as the whispered voice of one of those fiery darts suggested she hadn’t done anything wrong. She was just doing the Lord’s business after all by stopping indecision and making things happen. Linda and the rest were way to sensitive. It wasn’t long before she stopped seeing the need to truly repent of any sins. That was for other people. She had her faith life together and all her ducks in a row unlike most other people. It wasn’t long before she had drifted away from the Church and the faith.

Edgar had learned in college how all life had evolved over time and that the fossil record and geology backed up the theory of Evolution and disproved the story of Creation. The Creation story was a nice fable that was used to teach spiritual truths. But the rest of the Bible was probably true. Then the fiery darts started coming. One pointed to that story in Joshua about the sun standing still in the sky for a day. It suggested he investigate and see if that could’ve possibly happened. What he found on the internet suggested that if the earth stopped suddenly rotating the atmosphere surrounding the earth would continue at its 1100 mile per hour pace which would destroy everything on the surface of the earth. Another dart suggested questioning the virgin birth, the resurrection, and finally the very existence of God Himself.

The devil can and does work though others to attack us. He especially likes to involve our loved ones. But they are not the real enemies. Not even those of differing faith are the real enemies. They are people like you and I who the devil has successfully blinded from the truth. They are victims that he uses in his intricate plans to break the Church, one member by one member. He never sleeps. He’s always at work on us. And we often can’t see him coming.

That’s why Paul’s message here is so comforting. We do not fight this battle alone. In fact we do not even fight. It is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who fights for us. He gives us the means by which we do not fight, but we simply stand. Stand in faith. Stand in the strength and power of His might. The same power that created the heavens and the earth. The same God who commanded demons to come out of people. The same Jesus who defeated Satan and His power over us on the cross and will on the last day send Satan and all his demons to the eternal suffering of the fiery pit. By faith Jesus gives us His armor and empowers us to stand in faith as He defends and protects us.

He gives to us the breastplate of righteousness. When the devil accuses us of living sinful lives that can never please God, pointing out all our faults, we raise the breastplate of righteousness whose power is found in all the obedience that Christ exhibited for us during His earthly life. While our actions can never please the Father Jesus actions in our place have made us right with God, even though we continue to sin. While the devil’s attacks from multiple directions can leave us seemingly without sure footing to stand on we can stand firm with the shoes of readiness that are the gospel of peace. While we may wonder sometimes where we stand with our fellow man we can know by the Gospel that we have peace with God because Jesus took away all the Father’s anger over our sins. At peace with the God of the universe we can work at being at peace with those around us, standing on the sure footing of the Gospel which days Jesus did it all for us. When the devil shoots his fiery darts of accusation and doubts, pointing to all the things in my life that seem to suggest there is no God, or if there is He doesn’t care about me. These darts are not only deflected but extinguished by the shield of faith. We believe that we are forgiven, saved, protected, and have eternal life not by what we see but by what we hold to be true by faith. Likewise the helmet of salvation protects us from all the human logic that calls into question what the Gospel testifies to. This helmet allows us to rest in the fact that Christ has accomplished our salvation in total with nothing we need do contribute. It works in tandem with the Shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God to assure us that God’s Word is true and our salvation by grace through faith is true.

Tying this all together is the belt of truth. By this all our pieces of armor are in place and working together. And what is this truth? It is who Jesus had revealed Himself to be: true man and true God. Savior of the world. Savior of you and of me. That no matter what happens to our bodies on the last day He will reunite our Spirits with brand new bodies that we will live in forever. That Satan is no match for Him and that all these fiery darts, when we are protected by Christ’s armor, serve to strengthen faith instead of kill faith. Christ speaks the truth that the devil doesn’t want you to hear. As Jesus testified about Satan in **John 8:44** “**He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies**.” Instead the truth is that Jesus had died for your sins and in His death and resurrection He has defeated sin, death and hell. And He has done this just for you. And He gives to you His armor and the strength and power by which you can stand in it every time you participate in Word and Sacrament worship.

Paul wants us to know that (**verse 12**) “**we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil.”** These are formidable foes. On our own we have no hope of either winning or even standing in our faith. But by faith He gives us His armor and he empowers it so that we can stand against the devil and his demons. He renews that power of faith every time we partake of His Word and Sacrament. There will be times when we look around and it seems hopeless. But in Christ we have all the hope and protection needed to get us through today and all our tomorrows in faith that Christ has already accomplished everything necessary to get us to eternal life. Amen