

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

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**ST PAUL'S
LUTHERAN
CHURCH & SCHOOL**

St. Paul's Lutheran School

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September 14-16, 2024

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Text: Ephesians 6: 10-20

Sermon Theme: **With God's Armor, Christians Become Armed & Dangerous**

1. Ready to face the enemy
2. Willing to stand our spiritual ground
3. Able to win the war

Dear friends of Jesus,

Whether you realize it or not, you came from a battlefield this past week. *You* didn't have to make a special trip overseas or travel to some famous war site. You probably consider yourself a peaceful person, so it might surprise some people here to know that you're in the army now. And the army I'm speaking of is the LORD's Army, Yes Sir. Every Christian believer is drafted into it by Holy Baptism. The moment, your pastor applied water and the word to you, I **baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit**, we were each commissioned as God's warriors.

Our personal battlefields looked a lot like classrooms, offices, our church, or home. Common places we go every week were the sites of more than one Satanic attack. I doubt air raid sirens or red flashing lights warned you of the incoming conflict. But, I know you were engaged in more than one battle because I was too. Most of the time, these weren't physical battles. As Christian soldiers for the cross, we're fighting real spiritual battles with temptations, worries, and fear. There are times it feels like we're winning and times it feels like we're losing. But, make no mistake - we're locked into this deadly and damning conflict. If we go into the fray armed with our own human abilities or weapons, we certainly will lose the battle and more importantly, the war. That's why we need to look to our Spiritual Commander-in-Chief, the Savior, Jesus Christ in His Holy Word for divine direction. inspiration. and victory, eternal victory.

I said we often like to look at ourselves as Christian peacemakers. And didn't God call us to live at peace? That he did. God's word says: ***If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone (Romans 12:18)?*** So we tend to be squeamish around military metaphors when we sing "Onward Christian Soldiers, marching as to war" or "Stand up stand up for Jesus you soldiers of the cross. Those lyrics seem more appropriate for a military parade than for a church service. But, it was our Savior Jesus who first drew the line in the sand when he said: ***He who is not with me is against me (Luke 11:23).*** And God directs us all to ***Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called ... (1 Timothy 6:12).***

So on this Friendship Saturday/Sunday/Monday, we'll learn the truth in Ephesians, chapter 6, that **With God's Armor, Christians Become Armed & Dangerous**. We're ready, willing,

and able. We're ready to face our enemy. We're willing to stand our spiritual ground. And we're able to win the war against Satan.

The writer of Ephesians, the one our church is named for, the apostle Paul, had firsthand experience with Roman soldiers. As he was writing this letter from prison, he likely had a Roman soldier posted right next to him, as he described how he was an **ambassador in chains** imprisoned for the sake of spreading the name of Jesus to the people of his day. But, those prison chains couldn't contain His Christian Spirit. Instead, he looked to God alone and realized that **With God's Armor, Christians become Armed and Dangerous**. First, we're ready to face the enemy. We find out how as our sermon reading begins: ***1° Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.*** After everything Paul had said in the first five chapters to encourage believers in the battle, He tells us where to find our armor or strength - not in money, which is here today and spent tomorrow, not in human reason which is so limited compared with what God knows. No, ***Our help is in the name of the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth (Psalm 124:8).*** Our human efforts won't cut it against our spiritual enemies. That's like thinking that an umbrella will protect us from the business end of a machine gun. Alone, we have no more chance of victory than our first parents Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. But, with God's armor, found in His Word and Sacrament, is exactly what we need.

An important defense in any battle is long-range radar. It's used to detect enemy movements and missiles. Paul clearly picks up our spiritual enemies on his radar in the next verses of our reading ***11 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.*** Our real enemies aren't our fellow human beings, no matter how much dirt they do to us. Not Hollywood, the Media, not even Democrats or Republicans. They are all just pawns in the war. Paul identifies our real enemies don't have flesh and blood. Our real enemies are the devil - the leader of evil angels who want us to join him in hell, the world - who wants us to exchange short term pleasure for long-term problems, and our own sinful flesh that tempts us to follow anyone but Christ.

These enemies of the cross would like nothing better than for us to ignore them. Ignore them to our peril so they can wreak havoc on us. The devil knows he's going to hell at the end of days. But, he doesn't want to go alone. So this "Father of Lies" uses his bag of tricks to confuse unbelievers and Christians alike. He uses the small weapons like subtle habits that don't seem to hurt anyone: little white lies, gossiping even if it has some truth, "just one more drink at the party." Then Satan and his allies really bring out the heavy artillery: greed, divorce, and addiction that break up families, sex outside of marriage that hurts men and women of all ages. Finally these forces of evil use sin and death like a bomb - many don't see it coming until it actually strikes, until it's too late. Even Christians have battle scars of sin in our own lives. Sin hurts. Unconfessed sin actually damns. It all seems quite

hopeless until we remember: **With God's Armor, Christians Become Armed and Dangerous.** So let's be ready to face our enemies.

I have an important piece of artwork in my church office. It shows a father sitting next to the bed of his sleeping child, holding his teddy bear. A dark figure is about to attack the family. The father is praying to God for protection. And just before that dark angel can get close enough to strike, God's angel of light stops him in his tracks. What a perfect picture of God's help in our time of need. Paul put it this way: ¹³ **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.** Notice Paul doesn't say "If" the day of evil comes, but "When" it comes. There are going to be times when we're tempted to compromise our spiritual ground. People may think we are ridiculous for going to church, for serving, contributing, or even living by the standards of God's Holy Word. Especially on those days, be willing to stand our ground by holding on to Jesus and what He tells us in His Word. It's worth it to stand for our Savior who died for us and was raised again.

We don't go into battle half-dressed. Instead we go ready, willing, and able to win the eternal victory with the armor of God. Take a look at the artwork of Jason Jaspersen on the screen. It gives you a good visual of the armor of God. Paul goes on to describe the seven different spiritual weapons we go into every battle. First he says: **u Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist,** Just like a soldier's belt holds all his gear together, we need God's truth holding our Christian faith together. That truth shows up in our actions and conversations with others.

Paul tells us to: **stand firm with the breastplate of righteousness in place.** This defensive equipment was worn by soldiers like oversized shoulder pads and to guard the heart and other vital organs. This reminds us that the only defense for the guilt of our sins isn't our own "right living", but the right living of Jesus Christ who died on the cross for us. We are declared "justified or not guilty" by His Blood.

Next, Paul tells us that **our feet are to be fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.** A soldier with bare feet is almost stuck. In our daily battle with evil, we can be stuck by fear. But, knowing that we have peace with God takes away our fear, and replaces it with courage of knowing **if God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31).** That leads us to move our feet to quickly tell others of His love.

We're encouraged to **take up the shield of faith, which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.** The devil isn't going to tire of firing temptations or fears at us. At these times in a doctor's office, a hospital, or even in a funeral home, we defend ourselves with God's promises that tell us God will never let us down, not in this life nor the life to come.

For our head, the most vulnerable part of our bodies, we're told to **Take up the helmet of salvation.** This isn't just a football helmet. It's the truth that Christians have the certainty

of heaven when we die which gives us our brightest hope in our darkest days. This helmet protects us and motivates our minds.

The only offensive weapon in God's arsenal is the ***sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God***. This sword God's Spirit is the perfect weapon to cut through the noise and confusion of this world to show God's plan for our earthly and eternal good.

Finally, Paul reminds us to communicate with our heavenly headquarters when he says: ***Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests***. Every soldier in battle knows that it's important to keep **in** close contact with HQ. Isn't that the same with us? In prayer, God gives us a direct line to call in for reinforcements and to thank Him for help in our time of need. And don't forget to pray for fellow Christians that God may equip us to fight the good fight, to stand up for Jesus.

With these inspiring words, St. Paul calls us to battle. Who will win? Well unlike military battles, we already know the outcome. It's a done deal, nailed at the cross and opened on the Tomb of Jesus. Because, as Paul tells us: *Thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our LORD Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57)*. Jesus' victory is ours. Now, with God's armor, we are armed and dangerous. Company dismissed. And amen.