



**Be strong
in the Lord
and in the
POWER OF
His might**

Ephesians 6:10

Welcome

Hymn “Lead on, O King Eternal,” vv. 1,3 (UMH #580)

Scripture Ephesians 6:10-17 (CEB)

Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and his powerful strength. Put on God’s armor so that you can make a stand against the tricks of the devil. We aren’t fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens. Therefore, pick up the full armor of God so that you can stand your ground on the evil day and after you have done everything possible to still stand. So stand with the belt of truth around your waist, justice as your breastplate, and put shoes on your feet so that you are ready to spread the good news of peace. Above all, carry the shield of faith so that you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word.

Message “Wearing God’s Armor”

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Today’s scripture passage is interesting to study. We really aren’t familiar with an ancient soldier’s armor, but the people in Jesus’ day knew it well. The writer of Ephesians chose imagery that the readers of this letter to the church in Ephesus would recognize. I can imagine them picturing a

Roman soldier as they heard the letter being read, and it probably was an image that made them cringe. A Roman soldier would have looked something like this:



Soldiers were the guards who kept peace not always in a peaceful way, and they were always on the defensive. Their armor was to protect them from others who might attack, and it most likely gave them a sense of power over others. Today, we might have a more modern image of armor that would look like this:



Yet we mostly see these types of images in movies or on television. And I think it's important to know that the writer of Ephesians intentionally moved the idea of armor into something that could be a defense against powers that were even greater than any human enemy.

In verse 12 in today's passage says, "We aren't fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens." There is evil in the world. There are evil powers in our world, not made of human beings, but of forces that affect our lives every day. One commentator listed some of them as: systems, structures, habits that are racist, misogynist, hedonist, and materialist. (Doug Bratt, found in the commentary section of Text This Week under today's scripture passage.) I had a colleague who used to tell his congregation weekly that they needed to put on the armor of God every day.

The armor described in Ephesians 6 as God's armor is made of the gifts God gives us in order to have strength in a world that is often contrary to the way God wants us to live. We, as the Church, are called to claim those gifts and bring courage, confidence, and hope to others.

A story from the Korean War illustrates this attitude. As enemy forces advanced, Baker Company was cut off from the rest of their unit. For several hours no word was heard, even though headquarters repeatedly tried to communicate with the missing troops. Finally, a faint signal was received. Straining to hear, the corpsman asked, "Baker Company, do you read me?" "This is Baker Company," came the reply. "What is your situation?" asked the corpsman. "The enemy is to the east of us, the enemy is to the west of us, the enemy is to the north of us, the enemy is to the south of us." Then after a brief pause, the sergeant from Baker Company said with determination, "The enemy is not going to get away from us now!" Although surrounded and outnumbered, he was thinking of victory, not defeat. (https://www.preceptaustin.org/ephesians_sermon_illustrations_6)

The armor of God gives us a different perspective, a new assurance, and the belief that we don't walk alone, but are given the promise of God's presence, God's strength, and the tools God provides for living life faithfully as followers of Christ. We bring that message of hope and strength to those with whom we work, play, live, and interact. Others can

see our strength in the ways we speak, act, and live our lives. They witness how we go through the challenges of life and come out on the other side stronger, having grown in faith, learned about ourselves, and trusted God's presence with us.

It doesn't mean that we live without fear or that we don't stumble and fall at times. One pastor shared this story:

** Several years ago, my wife Carolyn and I were hiking on Mount Rainier in Washington when we came to a swollen, glacial stream. Someone had flattened one side of a log and dropped it across the river to form a crude bridge, but there was no handrail, and the log was slippery. The prospect of walking on the wet log was frightening, and Carolyn didn't want to cross. But she found the courage, and slowly, carefully she inched her way to the other side. On the way back we had to walk on the same log, and she did so with the same care. "Are you afraid?" I asked. "Of course," she replied, "that's what keeps me safe." Again, fully aware of the danger, she made her way to safety. He says, "Much of life poses moral danger for us. We should never assume in any situation that we're incapable of falling. We must watch and pray, arming ourselves for every occasion by putting our total trust in God. "God is faithful" and will give us the strength to keep from falling. (quote from David H. Roper, story found at https://www.preceptaustin.org/ephesians_sermon_illustrations_6)*

The armor God gives us is the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, which is living in right relationship with God and others, the shoes of proclaiming the peace that only God can give, the shield of faith keeping us firm in our journey with Christ and resists evil in all its forms, the helmet of salvation, which is our assurance of life in Christ forever, and the sword of the Spirit - the Word of God that teaches and informs us on our faith journeys.

All of this is brought together through prayer - pray without ceasing!

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was convinced that the prayers of God's people rather than his preaching accounted for the thousands who came to Christ through his ministry. Our praying is a powerful weapon in the war between God and the evils of this world. (Idea and partial quote from https://www.preceptaustin.org/ephesians_sermon_illustrations_6)

Maybe today, if we were to have a picture of an armor for our times, it might include:



a large heart for the breastplate



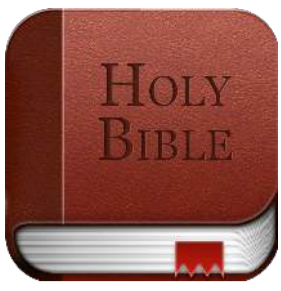
running shoes for peace



a mask to protect us from the COVID virus



a hat of some kind to keep Christ in mind



a Bible which is the word of God.

Most of all, we can pray in whatever way, in whatever situation, in whatever circumstance we find ourselves.



May this week, this month, this year, this life's journey be filled with the strength, confidence, joy, and hope of the presence of God as we wear God's armor every day. Amen.

Prayer

Almighty God, you give us strength to face challenges in our lives. Yet, we are so often unprepared and feel overwhelmed when circumstances bring loss and hardship. We are reminded that you are with us, giving us the peace, faith, and the power of your Spirit every day. Hold us in that faithful place where we grow in your grace, and continue to build our relationship with you, strengthening us for whatever life brings. Thank you for walking with us, and sometimes carrying us on the journey. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn "Standing on the Promises," vv. 1,4 (UMH #374)

Sending Forth



WE LIFT UP IN
PRAYER

Juliann
Joan Allen
Naomi
Erin Frane
Madeline
Charles Gilman
Josh Jones
Jenn
Gary
Joyce

Harry Junkins
Marilyn & Gil
Donna Smith
Sophia
Bobbie Noble
Dan Strange
Danny Westbrook
Marion Collishaw
Mark & Sarah
Delores

Terry Sessions
Vicky & Emily
Christine & her parents
Those in nursing and assisted living care
Our Church family



WHO WE ARE

FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



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