

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
September 2, 2018

Text: Ephesians 6:10-20

Theme: “Take It Up!”

“Finally,” so our text begins. It could be translated, “[Now to what] remains [to be addressed.]” (tou loipou—του λοιπου) This is the last subject matter Paul will speak to in this letter. Paul, this ambassador of the Gospel in chains, (vs 20) has written to encourage those brothers and sisters in the faith and in the fight, the fight against sin and evil that would love to pull them from the faith. He has already urged those are now light to live as light. They will do that by speaking the truth in love, by stopping any corrupting talk and speaking that which builds up. They do so, we do so, as we live in relationships in the manner shown by God to be pleasing to Him.

Now in the finally Paul says take your stand, the attacks come and they will be ferocious. Watch, be ready, take up the weapons God has given you. Paul is talking defense. In war and in most sports there is both offense and defense. Not all sports have defense, not allowed to deflect shots in golf. Offense can be more exciting. That is so in football as you make the big play and run down the field to score. But defense is no less important. It can turn things around. Yes, Paul’s words today are all about defense. Yes, I know there is one of these in the mix (a sword), but today’s text is a call to take your stand. The enemy advances and the enemy is formidable.

The enemy is not one of us. The enemy is not flesh and blood, not human. Now there are many humans who do oppose the church. Those who physical harm or kill believers in Christ come to mind as do apostles of atheism in western culture. But there is a deeper, stronger, more deadly enemy and danger beneath or behind these. Paul says the

battle is against rulers, against authorities, against cosmic powers over this present darkness, against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (vs 12). It's against Satan and his minions.

The attack does come. It's here already. Temptation is always at hand. Let the one who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. Paul wrote many years earlier in Galatians, "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do." (Galatians 5:17)

Peter calls us to be watchful and vigilant for the adversary, our adversary, the devil prowls like a roaring lion seeing someone to devour (1 Peter 4:8). We were by nature objects of wrath but we have been washed, made new in Christ in baptism. Guess what—Satan wants us back in his camp. Those baptized have renounced the devil and all his works and all his ways, but he would love to see us renounce our renouncing. We read in Revelation 12 that the dragon is furious with the woman (the church) and he goes forth to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. (vs 17) The enemy is powerful. The enemy is unconverted and unconvertable. He is alike a condemned man facing certain execution. Such a man has little to lose in many ways. Satan has nothing to lose. He delights in increasing hell's population. Peter calls us to resist him firm in your faith (1 Peter 5:9). This is what Paul is calling us to do.

He calls us to defense and we have a sure defense at hand even in hand. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God." (panhoplian). Maybe the "full" or "all" catches it a little better than "whole." Use it all, not only part of it. Paul lays out the pieces before us. There is the belt of truth, feet

equipped with the readiness of the Gospel of peace (who would think of going into battle barefooted?) Here is the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. There are six pieces (as you can see on this bit of a shield I have).

These would all be part of the equipment of a Roman soldier, yet there are some common pieces not listed. The soldier would wear greaves to protect his legs (maybe that's included in the footwear). There is no mention of the lance. This was the soldier's primary offensive weapon. In formation the soldiers would thrust the lance from behind the safety of the shields. The sword mentioned was primarily a defensive weapon. It was not swords drawn and the charge. If your sword was put into action it meant the enemy had taken the offensive and was right upon you.

Be ready the battle comes. It's here already. Paul exhorts us to always be praying, praying prayers and supplications all the time in the Spirit. In this praying we are being watchful and persevering in that watchfulness. We are praying of the saints, for our brothers and sisters. We are praying that they too may stand. They are coming, these enemies and they are formidable, too much for us. And there are more on the horizon. Defense. It's a battle for your soul.

Defense, but where's the offense? The One who is Faithful and True has gone on the offense and has conquered. The Son of God came from heaven above to earth below to engage the enemy. He comes showing His power by casting out demons, healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, stilling the storm. His power is not limited, yet He limits His use of the unlimited in humility and servanthood. He becomes obedient to death even death on a cross. He does so to make payment for sin, to settle accounts, to pay the debt of all our sin.

He came to conquer and He has. Not everyone believes this, but the devil knows this and shudders when he considers his eternal fate. Now he roars and wails knowing his troubling days are numbered. He will go down fighting but he will go down. “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,” (<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 2:14**) When Jesus was accused of casting out demons by the power of the devil His response included, <sup>20</sup> But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>21</sup> When a strong man, *fully armed*, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; <sup>22</sup> but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, *he takes away his armor* in which he trusted and divides his spoil. (Luke 11) The devil was “fully armed” with his “armor.” It is the same word as in our text—all the armor (panhoplian). He goes after the devil and disarms him. The devil can’t stop Him.

The devil’s flaming darts of temptation are extinguished. Jesus never falls. Jesus faced death, died, for real, but He comes out alive. The devil likes to accuse, but Jesus has shot down all his accusations. “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ has come, for the accuser of our brother has been thrown down...And they conquered him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the sword of their testimony.” (Revelation 12:10, 11) Satan did his worst. He succeeded in tempting sinners to kill the very Son of God. But what he thought was his greatest victory, was his worst defeat. He learns that when Christ shows up on his home field.

News of the conquering has been heralded. This is the offense, the news of Jesus’ victory. Paul had been changed from working for the enemy to the ambassador of the Victor. He endured hardships and persecutions, and opposition from false teachers as he proclaimed the Gospel truth. The message was loud and clear from his lips that salvation

was not from the law but by grace through faith in Jesus. He went from city to city, province to province, to synagogues and assembly halls, homes and the marketplace proclaiming Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Now as he writes, he is in chains, not free to come and go, yet from him the message goes out. He says, “[pray for] me...that the words may be given...in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel...that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.” (vs 19, 20)

The message has been going out, the Gospel news that proclaims the defeat of the enemy. Look at your brother and sister. You are clothed in the Victor. You have put on the new man created after the likeness of God (4:24). You are buried with, raised with and clothed with Christ in baptism. All that armor is the armor of our Lord Jesus. You have the belt of truth, the shoes of the Gospel, the breastplate of righteousness. I don't know if you have ever noticed or not, but these six pieces are in in two groups of three. The three I have just mentioned are ones might be wearing walking around camp.

But the enemy comes, take it up, take up all the armor. They're coming. They are upon us! Put on that helmet of salvation. Take up that shield of faith in one hand and the sword of the Spirit in the other. We could think of the full armor as an umbrella. Take it up, open it! It works. The flaming darts of temptation are taken by the shield of faith. The burn out without harm. Take that sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Jesus demonstrated its use in the wilderness when He was tempted. It does work. “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

While this defending is going on we are still walking in the light, being light. We are doing the good works God has made us to do. We are giving answer to those who ask us about the hope that is in us. People are convicted of their sins by the law and pointed to

the Savior in the Gospel. As this happens, more are putting Him on, more baptized brought from the camp of the enemy to household of God.

Look who's standing at the end. 'Be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life.' Paul writes Timothy shortly before he leaves this world (most likely), "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7-8) Put on the armor of God to be empowered to stand against the schemes of the devil...take up all the armor of God so that you will be strengthened to stand in opposition in that evil day when all things have taken place. Use the armor you are clothed with in Christ. When all the dust settles, you'll still be standing. For Jesus' sake. Amen