

August 22, 2021 **“Don’t Forget Your Armor”** (Ephesians 6:10 - 20) Allie Hubert

Take a moment and think about your morning routine. All the things you do when you get up in the morning. I’m sure we all have different routines, but I can almost guarantee that we all do something the same before we are completely ready. We get dressed! Typically, we dress in clothes that relate to what we’re going to be doing for the day. For example, we wear our Church Clothes on Sundays when we come to church, or our work clothes when we go to work. The clothes we wear are kind of like our uniform. And often, that uniform identifies who we are or what we do, and they help us do our job.

When I think of a uniform, I think of something worn by military personnel, police officers, firefighters, paramedics, or dispatchers. And sometimes that uniform includes body armor to protect the wearer, because the world can be so uncertain and dangerous. Many of my friends and I put on uniforms like these every day. And while these uniforms are important, there’s another uniform that’s even more important. The uniform of a Christian. We discussed it in Ephesians Chapter 6. The Armor of God. It’s not visible body armor, but we are provided a full set of armor to protect us from the trials and tribulations of the world and to stand firm in our faith. We just have to remember to put it on.

Our first two pieces of armor are the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. In order to stand firm in our faith we have to first know the truth about it. We need to know the truth about God’s love, the promise of salvation, and that God will never leave us. We also need to always tell the truth when we talk about God. When we share His love to people through mission or our everyday lives, we need to give honest and truthful testimonies.

Something I read that really stuck with me is that righteousness “is truth in action”. It’s the way we respond to God’s truth because we know His truth. I think that’s why we see the belt and the breastplate in the same verse. Righteousness is the way we follow God’s words and His commandments. It’s the way we act because we know He loves us, guides us, protects us, and will one day welcome us home to Heaven.

After the breastplate of righteousness we are told to put on whatever will make us ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. It’s fitting that the piece of armor that symbolizes the gospel of peace would be for our feet. After all, Jesus and his disciples traveled throughout the Middle East in order to teach, preach, and save. As Christians, we are tasked with carrying on that work through service and mission. We are tasked with going beyond the four walls of the church to bring the gospel, God’s peace, love, assurance, and

salvation to people who can't come to church. And not just to the people who can't come to church, but the people who don't want to come to church - the disenfranchised, the hurting, and the broken, the lost and afraid, the people who maybe feel like they don't have a place within these four walls. Not only do our feet need to be fitted with the Gospel of Peace, to help carry us on our mission and in our service, but we also need them to stand firm in our faith. There is nothing that compares to the peace we experience through God. The uncertainty in our world, the hatred, the war, the disbelief – it all tries to shake us, to make us question our faith and our beliefs. But by knowing God's truth, doing what is right, and proclaiming God's peace, we can withstand everything that tries to shake us and separate us from God.

Lisa Cook is an ordained Cumberland Presbyterian Church minister in Nashville, Tennessee. She was one of the speakers at the Presbyterian Youth Triennium in 2016. She founded Sacred Sparks Ministry which seeks to provide assistance and spiritual care for the population of Nashville that is experiencing homelessness. She prays with people in the streets, holds outdoor worship in the summer months which is open to everyone, helps to provide meals, and assists with emergency shelters during the winter months. I want to make a point about something. Reverend Cook will not refer to any of the people her ministry serves as “homeless”. She says they're all just people who happen to be experiencing homelessness. We often see people who experience things like homelessness or addiction or severe mental health problems as “others”. As people who have strayed from God, people who are beyond our help, or worse yet, people who are unworthy of our help. Reverend Cook has challenged these ideas. She has strapped onto her feet the Gospel of Peace, and she proclaims the Gospel every day. Her Church, the people experiencing homelessness in Nashville, Tennessee, face hardship and uncertainty every day – where they will eat, where they will sleep, if they'll be safe for another day. But they still believe. They have also strapped the Gospel of Peace onto their feet, so they can stand firm.

Our next piece of armor is the shield of faith. Shields in themselves are an interesting piece of armor. They used to be commonplace in different armies in the Old and New Testaments, but these days they are not used very often. The purpose of the shield of faith is pretty straightforward – our faith protects us. But faith is an interesting concept. Just like this armor that we're talking about, you can't really see faith. Faith is something that lives in you. And it changes and evolves as we go through our lives. It can grow or shrink; you can have faith in different things. For example, I have faith in God, and I also have faith that the sun will rise tomorrow morning. What I'm talking about, though, is faith in God, and how that protects us. It may be coincidental, but a lot of the time it seems to me that bad things happen in multiples. Has that ever happened to you?

Sometimes things happen and you're like "oooh God, it's really testing me right now". Testing my faith, my courage, my resolve. Sort of like a barrage of arrows. It all comes in at once. A shield can take all that damage from all those arrows for you at once. That's what our faith can do.

Something else to bear in mind when we think about shields is that many armies didn't use shields just for their individual fighters on the battlefield. Some armies deliberately used their shields in group formations, protecting the group from attacks to the front, top, rear, and sides of the formation. These tactics were highly effective at defending the army and preventing from injury. Every person was responsible for the safety of the other people in the formation. I can't help but to draw a parallel between ancient defense tactics using shields, and the power that we, and our faith, have as Christians. Our faith in God is not for us alone. It's for our family and our friends. It's stronger together, and together we can withstand anything. That's why we come to church, right? To share our faith with like-minded people? To spend time with the people who refill our spirits. I just want this to be a reminder; our church is not merely the four walls we are worshipping in today. Our church is all of us. The people. The people who are here today, the people who couldn't make it today, the people who are homebound or in the hospital. We are the church.

We have two pieces of armor left that we haven't talked about. I'm not going to lie. I got to this point in my sermon writing and I stopped. I wrote and deleted, rewrote and re-deleted. I really had to ponder the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit and what they mean to me.

First, the helmet of salvation. Reasonably, it's the last defensive piece of armor we're putting on. When I think about my daily life and when I put helmets on, the helmet always goes on last. My helmet's the last thing that goes on before getting on a bike or a motorcycle. It's the last piece of gear I put on at a fire scene before I do my task. And it's the last piece of equipment I put on if I'm working on the ambulance and I'm on scene of a rescue. None of this is to say that it isn't an important piece of armor or protection. That helmet is one of the most important pieces of protection. It protects my head and my brain from things I may run into that can cause physical damage. The helmet of salvation protects our brains from things we may run into that can cause spiritual damage. It's no secret that the world we live in is more hardened, chaotic, and in need than it has been before. The demands of everyday life on top of the national and international conflicts that we're seeing wears on us and that can chip away at our spirits. Sometimes life throws us curveballs and heartaches that we're not prepared to deal with ourselves. And sometimes our minds are a battlefield, with as much internal conflict as there is external

conflict. There doesn't have to be shame in that. As a piece of spiritual armor against all of this, we have the helmet of salvation. We will be saved by God, from the wars of men and from the wars in our minds. And just because we have this helmet on, doesn't mean we won't feel the blows when we get hit. It still hurts if you fall off a bike, even if you're wearing a helmet. It just softens the blow.

Finally, we have dressed in all of the defensive armor available to us, and we are left with the only piece of real weaponry mentioned in the passage. A sword of the Spirit, which the Epistle says is the word of God. What does that even mean? And how is it relevant? I pondered these questions for probably way longer than I should have. Eventually, I realized it made more sense to me to see the word of God as the actual piece of armor, rather than the sword. The word of God is for us to use and to share. When Jesus was being tempted by devil in the desert, he used God's word against the devil. As Christians we are sometimes tested or challenged in our faith. We can use God's word to defend our faith and to point back to Him. Early on in the scripture, we are told that there will come a day of evil. There will be a time when we have to defend our faith and our spirituality, and we will have to stand our ground. The armor that we have on will help to protect us and soften the blows. But the word of God and the Holy Spirit will help us defend our faith as a whole.

This is a battle we can't win alone. We are responsible for sharing our faith, the word of God, the promise of salvation, and the truth of God's power and love. We can do that together. I'm going to end with an observation I've made over the last year and a half, through this pandemic. Getting up every morning and putting on my uniform has been a choice. It's a choice I made consciously knowing that my job can be dangerous. Not only could I potentially contract a virus from sick patients, I have the potential to be injured or killed. Same with police officers, firefighters, and service members. Sometimes it wasn't an easy choice to make. As Christians, we also choose every day to live our lives as Christians. We know that sometimes it is not easy, either. And just like we don't forget to put on our uniforms every morning, when you get up, don't forget to put on your armor.