

Scripture and Sermon for August 23, 2015
By Diana Pelletier, Faith Formation Facilitator

Ephesians 6: 10-20

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the **whole armor of God**, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the **belt of truth** around your waist, and put on the **breastplate of righteousness**. As **shoes** for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the **gospel of peace**.

With all of these, take the **shield of faith**, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the **helmet of salvation**, and the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Let us pray, May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight oh Lord our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Have you ever had anyone suggest to you that you ought to answer the phone with a smile on your face, no matter your current mood? Why do you suppose they would suggest that? Well I believe the answer is pretty simple... It can be difficult to sound angry or sad or upset if you are smiling. Go ahead, try saying something to yourself like, "I am so angry," while smiling. (*Repeat while smiling*) It is amazing how difficult it is to feel angry, even when you are saying you are, with a smile on your face.

Jeff and I spent a couple of days in New York City at the beginning of this month. While there, we went to go see *Beautiful* on Broadway. In case you're not familiar with this show it is the musical biography of singer-songwriter Carole King's music making and is titled Beautiful after one of her famous songs.

Here are the lyrics to the opening verse and the refrain of Beautiful:

***You've got to get up every morning
With a smile on your face
And show the world all the love in your heart
Then people gonna treat you better
You're gonna find, yes you will
That you're beautiful as you feel***

Carole King seems to be offering a similar approach to life that the suggestion of answering the phone with a smile offers. She is telling us that when we are blessed to wake up each morning we have the choice as to how

we are going to live this day. If we choose to smile and show the world that we are filled with love then we will find that the world is better able to loves us back. Think about it: people are more likely to smile at you when you approach them with a smile. People are also more likely to be defensive and standoffish if they are approached that way.

How we engage with people and with the world around us can greatly impact the experiences we have.

Sometimes I become overwhelmed by the state of the world we live in. To turn on the news is to hear of war, sadness and heartbreak. We hear of tragedies people are bestowing upon other people. We hear of children who are falling victim to the self-consuming ways of the world.

And then I become even more overwhelmed when I look in the mirror. After all, what can affect *I* possibly have on the state of the world? I am only one person and like all of us, I have limitations and experiences of brokenness.

So what are any of us to do when we witness racism or religious persecution? What are we to do when we see inequality in this country that was built on the principal of equal rights of all people? What are we to do when we observe our children becoming lost in themselves and not caring about the people or the world around them?

In our epistle lesson for this morning we hear a portion of the conclusion of the letter that Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus that I believe helps to answer these

questions. Paul offers instructions to this community on how to live out the calling of Christian, the call to share the good news of God's love and saving power through Jesus Christ, with the world, no matter their circumstances.

Paul begins with a reminder that we are to find our strength in God; that apart from God we are weak. He talks about living in a time of "darkness" that is laden with "spiritual forces of evil" that followers must struggle against. At this point in history Christians were being persecuted, and even killed, just for being followers of Jesus. In fact, Paul wrote this letter and many of the other Epistle letters while '*an ambassador in chains*' as he puts it. You see, Paul was being imprisoned in Rome for what the Jewish people believed was blasphemy against God. Paul was not following societal norms, and you could say he was going against the grain in sharing the Gospel message of God's love through Jesus.

While the context may be different, the time of which Paul speaks does not sound all that different from the time we are living in today.

Despite these worldly evils and his own brokenness Paul remains upbeat and instructs us to put on the **Whole armor of God** in preparation for the metaphorical battle **against** the evils of the world. Paul suggests we are going to war therefore we need the right equipment to keep us safe and on the right path.

Theologian Susan Hylen helps us understand the meanings of the parts that make up the **Whole armor of God**:

‘The first piece of armor, the **Belt of truth**, aids us in speaking the truth in love to one another. God’s love is a truth we can rely on; salvation through Jesus’ death and resurrection is a truth we can believe in.

The **Breastplate of righteousness** covers and protects our hearts when we are made new as children of God. We are then able to live justice seeking, righteous lives.

We are to ground ourselves in the **gospel of peace** as our **Shoes** connect us to the earth. With the right grounding we are ready to proclaim the gospel of peace, remembering that in reconciling Jews and Gentiles into one body Christ "is our peace." (2:14)

The **Shield of faith** is the protecting gift of God’s salvation because it is through faith that God is made active in our lives and we are granted salvation.

The **Helmet of salvation** is the constant reminder of this gift of salvation, of God’s love for us.

And we are armed with the **Sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God’ which we can feed us and strengthen us.

Our reading from the Old Testament book of Joshua this morning tells us that we need to decide who we are going to serve and how we are going to live. When we wake up every morning and choose to serve God we can clothe ourselves in this armor of God which can give us the strength, the courage and the grounding we need to end war, to put a stop to inequality and to show the world all of the love in our hearts put there by God. By

taking up this armor as individuals and as a community of faith we become active in the fight against all the forces of evil in the world.

With the strength of God in us and the armor of God on us we become God's hand and heart in the world. God knows of our individual limitations and brokenness. God wants us to come together as a community of faith each week to be lifted up and sent out to change the world *one bit of truth, one bit of justice, and one act of love at a time.*

We can choose to put a smile on our face when we answer the phone knowing that even that small act can make a big difference in how we feel and in how others feel. We can wake up every morning ready to put on the whole armor of God so we can show the world all of the love God has for us and the world. With that love beaming out of us the world will become a more loving and just place for all.

God does not ask us to go it alone. God asks us to pray fervently that we might feel God's presence with us and be reminded of the armor we put on.

The Message (MSG)

¹⁰⁻¹² And that about wraps it up. God is strong, and he wants you strong. So take everything the Master has set out for you, well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way. This is no afternoon athletic contest that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.

¹³⁻¹⁸ Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation are more than words. Learn how to apply them. You'll need them throughout your life. God's Word is an *indispensable* weapon. In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out.

¹⁹⁻²⁰ And don't forget to pray for me. Pray that I'll know what to say and have the courage to say it at the right time, telling the mystery to one and all, the Message that I, jailbird preacher that I am, am responsible for getting out.

AMEN.