

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

25th August 2024 – Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 6:10-20

FULL PROTECTION

The animal world has some pretty amazing ways and means which different creatures use to protect themselves from those who wish to harm, kill or even eat them. Some use great speed to fly, run, hop or slither away. Some put themselves in holes, crevices, depths or heights where they can't be reached. Others either inject venom via a bite or the strike of a spur or sting which is so toxic that it stops a predator in its tracks, or they carry a poison in them which ensures that if a predator does eat one of their kind it will never do so again. There are those creatures which use colour or shape to deter attack, using these things either as camouflage so they can't be seen, or going the opposite way and having bright and bold colours, like reds and yellows, which warn of danger to anything wanting to mess with them. There are those who find safety in numbers, if one or two get eaten it probably won't be me, and those who are bigger, stronger, or louder than any would be predators to help themselves not get messed with.

And then, there are some, like the tortoise, which are neither strong, nor fast, nor scary, nor dangerous, and they certainly can't hurt anything or fight back, but they just hunker down under their armour and wait out any attack they might face. And, as long as they were just faced with their natural predators, this served them very well. And, in a way, when I think of us and the armour of God, the image of the tortoise fits really well – more on that in just a little while.

For us as humans, what do we have? Compared to most of the animals we would either like to eat or which may wish to harm us, we're not particularly fast, or strong, good at hiding or finding, and, naturally by ourselves, we don't really have any of those attributes I listed above. But what we do have, of course, is our intelligence, which throughout time has allowed us to develop different tools, clothing, methods, machines, so that we end up as the ones on top. For us it's not so much about using our natural abilities, as about taking on and using what we can from what is around us.

The image of the Armour of God which is in this reading from Ephesians is a well known and loved Bible passage, probably because it is one we can relate to so well. The way Paul writes it here we can easily picture everything God gives us in our spiritual life and how these things help us to resist the devil, stay close to God, and even go out with God's news to others. Many believe that Paul wrote this description taking it directly from what he knew about Roman soldiers, perhaps even looking out of his prison cell to those soldiers who were guarding him while he was writing.

To go back to thinking about how various animals defend and protect themselves, and also attack back, we said that the way we got to be on top as humans is by taking on, using, and adapting what is around us, what we are given. We can say the same about the armour of God and the protection it gives us. It all comes from God, it's not our own doing.

There is the belt of truth, which in a way holds everything in and together like a good belt does. This truth includes the fact that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. A belt is often the last piece of clothing we put on, and it reminds us that over everything we have God's loyalty and faithfulness to His promises to love and protect us always.

The armour, called either the armour of God's justice or righteousness; God's promises to us, His people, of His love, His grace. Armour protects the chest and the vital organs, in a way it's the last defence, and so if we are attacked and wounded in all other ways, we can hold on to knowing that nothing will take God's love and all that means away from us.

We have the sandals or shoes of the good news of peace. Standing on the news of God's forgiveness through Jesus for all people, we can stand firm. Any guilt, any temptations, which come against us we can deal with by standing firm and solid on knowing what it means that through Jesus we are forgiven.

Faith which is like a shield. A shield can be both a defensive and an offensive weapon, blocking any arrows, spears or swords which try to strike us, and in turn being able to be used to strike and push back at our enemy. Our faith is our protection against the flaming arrows of the devil, the arrows which say, 'God doesn't really love you', 'God will never forgive you', or, 'come to me and you can have whatever you want right now'.

Our helmet is of course very important, and Paul calls it the helmet of salvation. This helmet is knowing that we are joined to God's victory, and His love, through Jesus and all He has done for us. It protects us in our faith and our relationship with God by reminding us that we have God's love and forgiveness in everything we go through.

And finally, the sword; the Word of God which comes from the Spirit. The sword is different to all the others because it is about taking the fight back to our attacker. We see how this works in the Gospel accounts of Jesus being tempted by the devil, when after each of the devil's lies, Jesus says, 'God Word says ...'. It's the Word which says things to us like, 'For God so loved the world...', 'While we were still sinners Jesus died for us', 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul, strength, and mind'. The Word of God enables us to fight back because we aren't relying on ourselves or our own abilities, but striking back with the weapon of His strength, power, and love which God has given to us.

The armour of God incorporates all those things, and so much more. We could say a lot more about each different part. But think about all those different components of the armour which Paul lists here, and then think about the attacks we face in our faith, in daily life, from the devil, the world and people around us, each day. The doubts of: am I good enough? Can I be forgiven for what I have done? How many times will God forgive me when I continue to sin? What if it all isn't true, plenty of other people seem to believe that and appear to still be quite happy in their lives? The worries of: my relationships, my job, my health, my life, aren't what I really want them to be right now, where are you God in all of this? Will things go ok for my family? Will they come to know you? The big questions we can struggle to explain: Lord, do I really have a purpose in life? Why do bad things happen in this world to innocent people? Why do others seem to get away with doing bad things? Where are you God in all of this? And then, the temptations we face: to take the easy way out now. To put ourselves before others. To ignore God's way for us because other ways are more enticing.

All these things are what can be thrown at us as we live in faith in this world, and no doubt they were what Paul was thinking about when he wrote this description of the Armour of God. Knowing God's love, having His truth, standing firm on the good news of Jesus, having the assurance

that through Jesus we are both forgiven and saved, taking on what God gives us, in all these things God gives us what we need to help us stay strong and close to Him.

But still, Paul knows, despite all that God has done for us and now gives us, it won't always be easy, and that's why at the end he says, 'never stop praying'. Stay close to God and talking to Him. This is where I come back to the picture of the tortoise as I said earlier. When the tortoise gets attacked all it can do is bring everything in and shelter under the protection it has. For us, sometimes, when we go through those doubts, struggles, worries, temptations, that's all we can do to; come in and seek shelter under that armour of righteousness, that shield of faith, that helmet of salvation, and through prayer trust and stay close to God knowing He will protect us.

In the armour God gives to us in our faith, we have full protection. In the same way that in the natural world we use what other ways and means we can get to protect ourselves, in our spiritual life we can't withstand the devil or our struggles on our own, but we rely on what God gives to us. And, with Him, we know we have Full Protection. Even when we doubt, or struggle, or falter, the strength of knowing His love and forgiveness for us through Jesus is always there for us. Pray always for His help to stand firm, knowing that even at those times you feel fully under attack He can still help you to stand strong. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Is there an animal which has an ability to protect itself which you find particularly amazing or interesting?
- Think about all the components of the Armour God gives to us – if you can, look up Ephesians 6:10-20 and go through them. Is there one which is especially meaningful for you? Are there some which you find especially helpful to focus on in particular situations?
- Despite this armour we are given by God, are still times when you feel you can't stand the attacks which come against you in your faith, let alone fight back? Pray for these times or situations, and pray also for others you know who are struggling with spiritual attacks in their life.

Pray: thank God for all the armour He gives us to resist the devil, the world, and our sinful self. Ask Him to help us always stay close to Him in prayer, especially at those times we feel we may be overwhelmed.

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