

September 2, 2018
Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Ephesians 6:10–20

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Ephesians 6:10–20 (ESV)

The Whole Armor of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ!

Amen.

One of America's great storytellers was radio broadcaster Paul Harvey. His daily broadcast, *The Rest of the Story*, surprised listeners with unknown tales about famous American figures. But Paul Harvey also offered critical commentary about the state of American culture.

In one such commentary in 1964, he wrote an essay titled "If I Were the Devil," intended to be a warning to America against the moral decay and societal collapse that was so apparent to him. His approach in the essay was to describe how the devil would attack our nation. I'll read you a brief excerpt of that essay. You can easily access the "rest of the story online."

Harvey wrote: "With flattery and promises of power I would get the courts to vote against God and in favor of pornography. Thus I would evict God from the courthouse, then from the schoolhouse, then from the Houses of Congress. Then in his own churches I'd substitute psychology for religion and deify science. If I were Satan I'd make the symbol of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a bottle. If I were Satan I'd just keep doing what I'm doing."

Things haven't changed since this was first written and broadcast. People are struggling all around us. Many aren't asking big questions about life. They just want to make their paychecks go a little further.

Just want health insurance so their children are covered. Want to get along with their families. They struggle against depression, cancer, addiction, or guilt over past sins.

They just want a day when life isn't a constant struggle between one thing and the next. But it's not just "those other people." Life is a struggle for each and every one of us. Hardship and heartache are part of the daily struggle that we all face in this fallen world.

As great as those struggles are in our lives, we face an even greater struggle that isn't against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of evil at work. There really is a great cosmic struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan. Paul describes the struggles Christians face with such evil as a wrestling match. This match is not the fictional and sensationalized drama of pro wrestling where they are merely playing a part and they all are friends at the end of the day. The struggle between Good and evil is more a struggle of sly deceptions of a vicious but unseen enemy. This evil foe is behind the broken relationships and broken hearts that fall into his traps.

Satan attacks us so often without even being noticed as we are easily led astray. Though he may be shrewd, there's nothing weak about the one of whom Dr Martin Luther said in his great hymn, "On earth is not his equal."

Peter pictures the old evil foe as a roaring lion, while our Lord describes him as the father of all lies. The warning from St. Paul is that our struggle is not just paying the bills or facing health issues, as hard and intense as those are, but rather facing this fierce enemy who seeks only our destruction.

How can we possibly stand against Satan and the dark forces of evil?

The only way we can stand against Satan is by knowing we don't have the strength within us. Left to our own devices, we cannot stand. We are easy prey for the devil's snares of lies and lust. In our weakness, we easily stumble into his traps of selfishness and greed. We are just not equipped to battle against this fierce foe.

But our strength comes from the Lord. While our text is often translated, "Be strong in the Lord," it's perhaps better understood as "be strengthened in the Lord."

Our strength is not found in our knowledge, effort, or even our faltering faith, but in Christ alone.

It is in Christ and His cross that we are strengthened for the struggles against the devil's wiles that we face each day.

For though our Lord Jesus Christ came in humility and weakness, He alone is our refuge and strength. He is the one who conquered sin by keeping the Law perfectly in our place. He is the one who vanquished death by His triumphant death and resurrection from the grave.

The Son of Man came to crush Satan's head and open for us the way of everlasting life. Your strength comes from the one who is mighty to save.

It's as Paul prayed for the Ephesians, that they be "*strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being*" (3:16).

It is the strength that comes from God alone that enables you to stand.

Even in a world of “COEXIST” bumper stickers and intolerant demands for tolerance, the people of God are able to stand for and by the truth of God’s Word.

We are able to stand against the devil and his schemes. For we have put on the new man, Christ Jesus, in the waters of Holy Baptism. When Paul calls us to put on the full armor of God, the various pieces of armor that he proceeds to describe are all given in the one garment we put on in Holy Baptism.

Clothed in Christ and His strength, we are able to stand against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, and against the spiritual forces of evil.

Strengthened by the Holy Spirit at work through the Word, we can stand firm in the Lord. Our spiritual knees may be wobbly and weak. We may be afraid as we gaze upon the enemies who attack us. We may be full of doubts and uncertainty standing against the devil and all the forces of evil.

But the One who is in you, Christ Jesus the crucified and risen Lord, is greater than the one who is in the world, that old evil foe.

So we can take heart and stand firm with the strength that the Lord gives.

Satan and the dark forces of evil will continue to wage war against the saints of God. Our life this side of eternity will still be marred by an ongoing wrestling match with the enemies. We will continue to see Satan at work even in the courthouses, schoolhouses, state houses, and our houses.

But we are strengthened in the Lord as the Holy Spirit strengthens the baptized through His mighty Word.

In the Lord's strength and the power of His might, which is yours in baptism, we will not be misled by the devil's lies or fall into his traps.

Instead, when evil comes, after we have tried everything else, we can look to Christ, which we should have done in the first place, and we can be strengthened to stand firm to the end.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

S. D. G - Soli Deo Gloria

To God alone be glory

God Desires That Our Hearts Belong to Him

Mark 7:1–13

1. We are guilty of false advertising.
2. God so desires that our hearts belong to Him that He gave His own Son.
3. In the Sacraments, the Lord strips away our hypocrisy to make our hearts truly His.