

The Rev Ken Wratten

14B Pentecost / Proper 16: August 26, 2018

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

Joshua said, 'As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.'

Ephesians 6:10-20

Put on the whole armor of God.

John 6:56-69

Many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

Shakespeare: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

- *Hamlet* (1.5.167-8), Hamlet to Horatio

Paul: Ephesians 6:12 King James Version (KJV)

"¹²For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Jesus is the bread of heaven, the cup of salvation. When we choose to take him in; he is in us, and we are in him. We receive him / his Spirit / spiritual blessing / spiritual strength. We become who we really are – spiritual beings in a physical body; in the world but not of the world.

Do you believe that there is spiritual warfare going on? Do you believe that the evil we see in the world is part of something bigger than the people in the headlines? Is there anything we can do about war, suffering, crimes, disease, hatred, lust for power, fires and earthquakes?

Years ago I was explained something very interesting about Genesis 1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the deep." Did God create *ex nihilo* or *ex profundo*? *Ex profundo* implies bringing order out of chaos; chaos that sometimes breaks through the order of creation. I.e, it just happens; not from evil spiritual forces. So there is humanity's sin – like Cane killing Abel. There is chaos – like the volcano on the Big Island; or at a cellular level – as with cancer. And there are spiritual forces at work in the heavenly realm.

Mark 1:23-27, "²³ (Just then) a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" ²⁵ "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" ²⁶ The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. ²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.""

Spiritual forces are at work, for good and for bad. Godly forces, and forces arrayed against God. Our Bible tells us that.

Ephesians 1:3 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Our being united with Christ, our abiding in him and him in us, has made us beneficiaries of powers that work for us personally... to bless us; and at a higher level... to provide us with resources to withstand any powers that are not of God. There is a spiritual battle in the heavens, but God’s power is invincible.

Paul is teaching us to use every piece of God’s armor to resist attacks, and stand true to God in the midst of spiritual ‘arrows’.

“Stand your ground... stand firm.” We have been given what we need to withstand any assault, because of God’s strength – dressed in God’s armor.

Belt of truth: We have God’s truth in us. Rely on it to discern if we are on the right path.

Breastplate of righteousness: God’s righteousness protects our hearts with knowledge of our self-worth, knowing his approval of us and love for us.

Feet fitted to spread the Good News: Not allowing ourselves to give up, thinking it is hopeless in this world. It isn’t. God provides us with motivation to share our personal experiences of God’s peace that passes understanding.

Shield of faith: to extinguish flaming arrows of insults, setbacks in faith, temptations. God gives us perseverance to begin again every new day, knowing that God has the ultimate victory.

Helmet of salvation: for protection and a symbol of victory. The helmet protects our minds from doubting God’s unconditional love for us.

Sword of the Spirit: Prayers: the only ‘offensive’ weapon in this list of armor. There are times we need to take the offence against lies, wrongs, insults, temptations. The battle is spiritual and needs to be fought with God’s strength.

Through our faith that Jesus Christ lives in us and we in him, we have been given the full armor of God. I remember in my corporate life, I was given a book to follow called “Dress for Success”. I went to work every day wearing a 3-piece suit and wing tip shoes. My boss once pointed out to me that my belt and my shoes didn’t match. There is a spiritual dress code, too; it is the whole armor of God.

Whatever the source of the arrows in your life, may God’s armor give you the courage to stand firm...

The Bible says, Romans 8:31, “³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” AMEN.