



“WHATEVER WILL MAKE YOU READY”
SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 6: 10-20
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
August 22, 2021
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Ephesians 6:10-20

6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.

6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

6:12 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.

6:13 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.

6:14 Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness.

6:15 As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.

6:16 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.

6:17 Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

6:18 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.

6:19 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,

6:20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

The Word of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

(Play “The Living” Video)

Another week of life on this planet--just one week--and so much has unfolded. Whether you have read the news or not, whether you are aware or not, all of it has happened to you and to me--to all of us.

The earthquake in Haiti, the desperation in Afghanistan, the burning in California, the flooding in this part of the planet we call home, the resurgence of COVID and multitudes stricken down--all of it has happened to all of us.

We carry it around in our bodies and in our spirits--our human family in the grip of so much destruction, so much harm, so much sorrow.

Your proximity to any of these layers of our shared life on the planet earth this week is something you may lean into for a sense of protection. You try to distance yourself--there are lots of tools we use for that.

Confusion--or a feigned lack of understanding.

Intellectualization--trying to think and explain your way through emotionally shattering realities.

Helplessness--the problem just seems too big to know what to do about it.

Anger--find someone to blame, find someone to be mad at and channel your energy that way.

Denial and Avoidance--trying to go about your days as if nothing is wrong.

Distraction--Busying yourself with tasks that make things feel normal.

But these things don't really protect you from anything. They are coping skills, but they do not protect you from the impact, from the truth--you and I are doing more than we want to admit to keep the wheels turning on this story of humanity's self-destruction.

Paul had deeply impacted the Ephesian way of life, and the landscape of what it meant to live out the Gospel. There was both mythology and reality around who he was and how he moved. The import of Paul in Ephesus was really not

about a cult of personality, but the integrity of a movement for transformation that was intended for the freedom of all people from the chains that keep us from knowing our full identity in God.

We don't know what the recipients of this letter knew about Paul--he may have well been dead when this exhortation was written--it was common for letters to be written by followers in the voice of their teacher. And we don't know how it was received--but we can certainly hear the strong Pauline counsel that the letter carried to those believers--because that same counsel comes to us with a palpable force in these tumultuous times we live in.

The message is not about standing firm to protect dogma or reputation or even physical safety. Paul's voice is deployed in these final verses of Ephesians to frame the battle we all face as a cosmic one.

We need to know our enemy--it is not the people who disagree with you or who believe differently than you do--the enemy is the powers and principalities who destroy the human spirit, who pit humans against each other, who distort perspectives and wills so that we end up crumbling from our own self-destruction.

The powers and principalities know how to capitalize on our vulnerability as human beings.

The powers and principalities know how suggestible we are, how quickly we can forget our deep connection to all things, to all people, and to live as if our purpose in life is to simply fend for ourselves.

This exhortation is for us to never surrender the truth about who we are in Christ--we are not individuals, but communities waking up again to our true nature as siblings, as family, as connected from the roots up. When we try to live as if we are not, that's when the powers and principalities get a foothold in our cultures, in our psyches, in our spirits, and in our instincts.

That's why we need the full armor of God--every part of us covered and sealed by God's love--covered and sealed by the same cover and seal that Divinity adorns herself with so that She can so intimately and faithfully love a world that desecrates Her dreams for us so consistently.

What happens when we see ourselves this way--as covered, as sealed, even as protected, by God's love? What does seeing ourselves this way change about how we actually move in the world?

It's a question worth our time today because this whole idea of protection is a dangerous thing.

(put up the picture of Prophet's Rock; split screen. Picture uploaded this morning)

This is called "Prophets Rock" and it's in West Lafayette, Indiana. I know this rock because we lived across the road from it before we moved here.

The story of this rock is your story, our story--the story of a nation being born at the expense of so many. It's the story of seeking truth and seeking protection.

Tecumseh, a Shawnee Chief, saw multiple family members killed in battles against white colonizers. He was trained as a warrior by one of his brothers who died. His father died in battle early in his life. He himself began fighting against the colonizers when he was 15 years old.

His brother, Tenskwatawa, joined Tecumseh in speaking against cultural assimilation with white ways. Tenskwatawa came to be known as "The Prophet" after a near death experience (some say induced by drinking a lethal amount of alcohol that put him into a coma) saying that he had seen heaven and all indigenous people living together. He also correctly predicted a solar eclipse. Both of these things garnered "The Prophet" a following.

Tecumseh became chief of the Shawnee and encouraged building coalitions with other indigenous tribes. He set himself to the task of building a republic made up of multiple tribes so that they could band together against their common enemy--white colonizers and their quest to take over all the land that indigenous tribes had lived on for generations.

Prophetstown in Indiana is the place they founded--and it became home to multiple members of multiple tribes. Seneca, Wyandot, Sac, Fox, Winnebago, Potawatomi, Kickapoo, Chippewa, Ottawa, Delaware, Miami, and Shawnee.

Tecumseh believed there was protection in this plan-- a way to be stronger together against a formidable foe.

He left Prophetstown to go South and recruit among the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and multiple tribes that came to be known as the Creek. He instructed his brother, "The Prophet," not to engage in any battle while he was gone.

William Henry Harrison, the then governor of the Indiana territory, who would later become the 9th president of the United States and the President with only a 32 day tenure in office when he died of pneumonia becoming the first President to die in office--he took Tecumseh's absence as an opportunity to come and destroy Prophetstown. The resistance from this Indigenous republic had become a problem for the United States government in their quest to take control of the midwestern territories.

When Harrison moved his troops in, The Prophet made a decision to attack against his brother's advice. The story goes that he sat on this rock, Prophets Rock, and chanted--and told his people that they would be protected against the white man's bullets as long as he chanted.

(take the picture down--back to just MMS)

Many died that day in that battle in the fall of 1811. And William Henry Harrison burned Prophetstown to the ground. Tecumseh returned 3 months later to find his community destroyed. He then allied with the British in the war of 1812, and was killed in the Battle of the Thames in 1813.

Later in 1838 the Potawatomi people were rounded up at gunpoint and marched from Indiana to Kansas in a forced removal known as the Trail of Death because so many died. Their forced removal went by this rock, through these battlefields. The whole idea of protection can be a dangerous thing.

White colonizers believed they were authorized by God to take this land and Christianize it. The torture and violence they brought with them was spawned by the trauma they brought with them from the brutal violence of Northern Europe. No one was really safe.

The powers and principalities are a force that outstretch the evil that humans do to each other--they use us and abuse us. They exploit our vulnerabilities and find ways to destroy.

The sorrow of this story about multiple promises of protection is all the ways white violence unleashed this chain of events--the layers of trauma that reside in our collectives and in our cells today.

ALL of what is happening in our world today is connected to the scourge of white violence--propelled by the mythology of supremacy. Afghanistan, Haiti, Climate Change and the extreme weather and the West Coast burning, COVID and the politicization of vaccines and masks. The brokenness of just being human together--taking care of each other has been occupied by the powers and principalities.

If you don't see the connections between white supremacy and what's happened in Afghanistan, put on the armor of God and go deeper into this country's role in occupying countries where we have a financial interest. We love to evoke human rights when it helps shore up a collective sense of the moral high ground. Many in our human family have died and been shattered by the mythology of protection as it was used and abused in Afghanistan these last twenty years. We must work together to find clarity on the dangerous ways the promise of protection can create more harm in the end.

If you don't see the connections between white supremacy and what's happened in Haiti, put on the armor of God and go deeper into the way the slave trade and white entitlement to resources stole resources from Haiti even after its liberation. Haiti's lack of infrastructure is a direct result of white supremacy. But yet we hear more about corruption among Haitians than we ever hear about the true story of what has been extracted from that country by the French and by Americans as well--including the story of how aid from America in the wake of natural disasters is stolen by contractors and how little of it gets to the Haitian people.

And how about all the people who say God will protect them from COVID so they are not getting the vaccine. The idea of protection is a dangerous thing when we divorce it from a critical consciousness.

When you think about it, the whole idea of supremacy was born out of an impulse to protect--to protect wealth, to protect power, to protect certain people from having to see their own pain and vulnerability. Supremacy was a lie built to protect that doesn't really protect at all.

That's a trademark move of the powers and principalities--they promise protection, when they are hard at work destroying us at the same time.

Paul's evocation of protection is dangerous, too. Because we come to it weary and pushed against many different kinds of walls--some proverbial and some all too real. We must bring that same critical consciousness that helps us see through the things happening around us to this invitation to believe that our faith can protect us from anything.

Paul was either in jail or already dead when this Epistle was written. He had a warrior mentality that he knew did not protect him against bodily harm or death. In a very real sense Paul saw himself as a soldier in a battle that had already been won by Christ--which is part of why the armor of God protected him ultimately.

Because the armor of God was never meant to be protection against violence, hardship, or even death. This was the armor of truth and belief that protected Paul against the disintegration of his soul--his selling out to the powers and principalities.

The ministry of Paul in Ephesus--not just with one church, but in a city, in a community--was transforming things. Paul never lost his commitment to the gospel message that all nations were washed in God's love--that the barriers and mentalities and borders that divided the human family were false. That the truth is in our kinship, not in dogma or superiority.

When we let Paul's inspiring words find a home in us, we must remember how they also found a home in white colonizers, in European crusaders, in power abusers throughout the ages. And we must let that critical consciousness and humility be a part of the armor we put on each day.

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.

6:14 Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness.

6:15 As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.

So we will continue the work that God has called us to do together of building something new, something that is based on the truth of mutual liberation and not in denial about our impact on a world in the grip of annihilation, Grace Covenant. We can stand firm because we are learning the truth about ourselves and the world we call home.

Whatever will make you ready to stay present in the pain and the promise of a world still struggling to find our way to the promised land where we can all rest easy and feel safe and protected.

That's what the armor God promises--not protection from vulnerability or danger, from trial or tribulation. But protection from losing your humanity to the temptation of robbing others of theirs.

Thanks be to God.