

The Full Armor of God

Ephesians 6:10-17

The Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity, October 21, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

You are doing battle with the devil and all of his demons. You have no choice in whether or not you do battle with them. They have attacked you. They have declared war on God and on His creation. Since they have declared war on creation, they have declared war on you. There is no way to avoid it. If you pretend like you are not doing battle with the devil, you are deceiving yourself and the devil will win the battle and you will be in hell with him.

The devil has a twofold attack on you.

First, he tempts you. The chief way that he tempts you is by lying to you. He lies to you about sin. He tells several lies to you in order to get you to sin. He may tell you that the sin is not really a sin. He may tell you that God will not judge that sin. He may tell you that God is not serious about His judgments on sin. He may tell you not to worry God will overlook that sin, but the devil will call that forgiveness even though that is not what forgiveness is, so he lies to you about forgiveness and tells you that forgiveness is when God overlooks a sin and that is not what forgiveness is. He may lie to you about the consequences in this life if you sin. He will lie about righteousness and tell you that righteousness is not worth living. Whatever the lie is, he will make the sin either not seem wrong, or seem ok, or seem advantageous, or just seem plain old pleasurable and nice.

Second, he accuses you. The devil does not just tempt. He also accuses. The word devil means slanderous one. He accuses. The word Satan means accuser or adversary. In some legal contexts in the Bible the word Satan can even mean prosecuting attorney. The devil accuses. While the devil does not know what specifically is going on in your heart and mind because he cannot see into it the way that God can, the devil has enough experience to know how human beings think. He knows how to accuse. So if he tempts you with something that you commit the sin with which he was tempting you, he will turn around and accuse you of what you did that he wanted you to do. The devil is not your friend or your buddy. He may seem that way when he is tempting you. He wants you to think that he is while he is tempting you, but once you have succumbed to temptation and committed the sin, he reveals his true colors. He accuses you. He points out how awful what you have done is. He points out all of the people that you have hurt by this action. He points out all of the shame that is yours because of what you have done. He points out everything that you have lost or are going to lose because of the sin that you have committed.

His goal is one of two things. When he accuses you he either wants you to despair of God's grace or rely on your own righteousness. He does not care which. If he can accuse you to the point that you think that what you have done is so bad that not even God will forgive it in spite of the fact that He sent His own Son to die to take away your sin, then you despair of the grace of God. To despair that God will forgive you is faithlessness and unbelief. And the devil has you.

If however, you respond to the devil's accusation by pointing out your own righteousness to him, he still has you. Some people respond to accusations by pointing out all of the good things that they have done that will make up for the bad things that they have done. Or they will respond to the devil's accusations by saying that what they did was not that bad. At least it was not as bad as what other people have done. If the devil can get this response out of you, then he has you trusting in your own righteousness instead of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The devil loves to get this response and the easiest way for him to get this response is to accuse people in front of other people. When the devil arranges for an accusation to be delivered in front of other people that is when we really rely on our own righteousness and not on the righteousness of Jesus Christ. When we are not relying on the righteousness of Jesus Christ we are unbelievers and we are going to hell. The devil has us.

This is the devil's two pronged approach. He tempts and then he accuses. He does not do one or the other. He does both.

So behind every temptation stands a demon.

Behind every portrayal of sin in media is a demon wanting you to think about this sin, meditate upon it, and then act upon it. Behind every pain is a demon using that pain to get you to trust in something or someone other than God. Behind every lustful image is a demon. Behind every presentation of riches or pleasure to incite discontent with the life God has given us is a demon. Behind your neighbor's wife, house, and vacation stands a demon tempting you to covet what your neighbor has and then to find some way to take it. Behind everything in which you trust which is not God stands a demon working as hard as he can to place you into a position where he may accuse you.

Behind every accusation is a demon. God allows the demons to accuse us because their accusations are many times true even though they also lie in some of the accusations hoping that you will believe them. The demons use every pang of conscience that you experience in order to attack your soul. With every accusation they want you to either despair that God has given you His grace in Christ Jesus or they want you to trust in your own righteousness. Either way they have you. It makes no difference to them.

Therefore in order to do battle with the devil and his army, take up the full armor of God.

The first piece of the armor of God is the truth. The translation says to put on the belt of truth, but that is not what the original says. The original says to gird your loins with the truth. The truth therefore is the underwear of the armor of God. It is not the underwear in the sense of comfort, but in the sense that the truth God underlies the entire armor of God. Without the truth of God there is no other armor of God. Unless one's loins are girded for battle, the rest of the armor will work against the person who is wearing them.

Without the truth there is no breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate of righteousness is the breastplate of Christ's righteousness. The truth of God is the truth that tells us that Christ has made His righteousness ours. He has given us righteousness. He has forgiven

us of our sins. We are righteous before God in Christ Jesus. That is the truth that God tells us. The reason that it is a breastplate of righteousness is because the breastplate protects the soldier's heart from arrows and attacks of the enemy. The breastplate of an average Roman soldier in ancient times fastened around the body to armor that protected his back. So from in front or from behind the righteousness of Jesus protects the person wearing it from any accusation of Satan.

Here Luther is instructive. He reports that the devil would come to him in his conscience and accuse him of his sins. When the devil was done Luther would respond by telling the devil, "You are right, devil, I have done all of those evil things. And here are a few evil things that I have done that you did not mention. But I am baptized." When Luther says that he is baptized he is simply asserting against the devil's accusations that he has the righteousness of Christ. And if you or anyone has the righteousness of Christ then it does not matter of what Satan accuses you. You have the righteousness of Christ. You are not depending upon your own righteousness. You are depending on the righteousness of Christ.

That is the breastplate of righteousness. That is how it protects you from the devil. It cannot be put on without the truth girding your loins.

A soldier cannot go into battle without shoes. I cannot even walk across the church's parking lot without shoes. How can a person go into battle without shoes? He can have all of the armor in the world. If he does not have footwear, all of his armor amounts to nothing. He will be paralyzed when the enemy comes and the enemy will kill him.

The gospel of peace is your footwear. The Gospel of peace is the message from God that your sins are forgiven for the sake of the death of Christ. The death of Christ atones for your sins. If God has forgiven you then God is not holding your sins against you. He will not damn you. He will rather give you everlasting life. This grants hope and with that hope comes peace.

If your sins are forgiven, then God is not longer against you. If God is no longer against you, then you are at peace with God. This is the Gospel of peace. The Gospel of peace keeps you from being paralyzed in the face of the devil's accusations. The Gospel of peace especially keeps you from being paralyzed when the devil accuses you in public. When the devil makes sure that your sins become public knowledge, the Gospel of peace prevents you from being paralyzed and carrying out your vocations in accordance with God's will. It makes you mobile. It shoes your feet.

But without the truth there is no Gospel. God tells us His own truth and that is the Gospel of peace. The truth underlies and holds up the Gospel.

Take up the shield of faith. Faith is the status of being of a human where he actually in fact believes what God has told him. God has told you that your sins are forgiven. If you have faith, you actually believe that. If you actually believe that, then the devil can accuse you all that he wants. It does not matter. His accusations are nothing.

What do you think the flaming arrows of the devil are except for his accusations and temptations? They are his flaming arrows. Faith is a shield because faith actually believes that it is forgiven. That faith renders the accusations of the devil null and void. If God is believed then the devil surely will not be. When the accusations are rendered null and void then the

temptations lose their power also for temptations and accusations feed off of one another. The more a person is accused the more he is tempted and vice versa. When one goes, the other goes with it. Therefore when faith extinguishes the accusations of the devil it extinguishes his temptations with it.

I am so pleased to serve a congregation filled with athletes. I really am. One of the reasons that I am pleased to serve a congregation with athletes is that I am not one. Not in high school nor in college did I participate in organized athletics. Chess was my game. I went to statewide tournaments in high school together with a whole team of players. One of the most embarrassing moments of my life was when one of the chess coaches asked the principle to organize a pep rally for the chess team and the principal agreed and it came complete with cheer leaders and the whole thing.

Now here is the deal with chess. You cannot play a defensive game and win. If you want to win, you need to play an offensive game. In my observation of sporting events that is true in other sports as well. In football and basketball a team cannot play merely a defensive game and expect to win. One must play an offensive game in order to win. When the girls are little volleyball looks like a defensive game because both teams are trying to keep the ball from hitting the ground on their own side of the net, but give the girls enough time and experience and pretty soon they are figuring out how to return the ball over the net in such a way that the other team cannot return it. And they call it a "kill." Not even in football is anything called a kill, but in volleyball there they are killing each other.

And so it is with your battle against the devil, you cannot fight a defensive war and beat him. You must fight an offensive war if you are going to defeat him. In order to fight an offensive war against the devil, you will need to take up the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

The word for sword here refers specifically to the sword that the Roman soldier used for fighting in close combat. It is shorter than a big broadsword and yet longer than a dagger. And your warfare with the devil and his demons is close combat. You do not have the luxury of holding him at arm's distance. He is not fighting you from afar. He is fighting you and waging war against you in your own heart and desires, in your thoughts and conscience. And he will win unless you take up the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

So, find a preacher who will preach you the Word of God. And read the Bible. Read it slowly. If you do Portals of Prayer and are not looking up the Bible references and reading them, but merely reading the devotion that the Portals of Prayer offers you, start reading the Bible passages that the devotion references. If you are already reading the Bible passages that the devotion references, start reading the whole chapter of the reference. In fact I recommend that you read one book of the Bible per week. Take the book of Ephesians. It is only six chapters long. I can read that in a couple of hours on a Sunday afternoon. It does not take long. Read it slowly. The Bible's writing is dense. That is to say that it has a lot of stuff packed into short books of the Bible. It says a lot by using only a few details. Pastor Podoll is still telling the joke at pastor's conferences, "When did they put that in there?" He has been reading and studying

the Bible his whole life and he still finds things in there that he has not noticed before. That is because the Bible is dense. It is loaded with so many things that it is easy to miss them. Read the Bible slowly. If you are by yourself, read it aloud to yourself. It will change the way that you think. And that is the point.

When you are in the throes of temptation, it is too late to start reading the Word of God then. My personal experience has been that when I am in the midst of temptation and I have not prepared my heart and mind with the Word of God, I will simply succumb to the temptation and commit the sin. It is only when my heart and mind have been changed and altered by the Word of God that I am prepared for temptation. In fact when your mind and heart are altered sufficiently by the Word of God certain temptations cease to be temptations at all.

I know a pastor who memorized the book of Psalms. It took him a while to do it. He had to figure out a way to learn a new psalm without forgetting all of the other ones that he had already learned. When he got done, he said it changes the way that he thinks. And that is the beauty of the Word of God. It alters your thinking and when your thinking is altered, it alters your desires. When your desires are altered, temptation has no power. And when temptation has no power, accusation does not have any power either.

This is how you do battle. And this is how you win. Losing is too costly, eternally costly. We are in the battle and we are in the battle to win. And God has equipped us for victory.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.