



**Mennonite
Church
Canada**

Resource Centre

Sermon

Author Lynette Schroeder Wiebe
Church Charleswood Mennonite
Church, Wpg. MB
Date 2002

This sermon is part of a larger sermon archive available as an inspirational resource to teachers, ministers and others of Mennonite Church Canada ©2005. Posted by permission of the author. May not be reproduced or redistributed. Permission to quote excerpts is granted.

The whole armour of God

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-13

Reader 1:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of God's power.

Reader 2:

Be strong
But don't be strong in yourself -
In your muscles and your mass -
In your swaggering saga of,
"I can do anything! Just watch."

Be strong in something that you cannot bench press or measure,
something that weighs less than a feather,
but can withstand the pressure of the ages.

Reader 1:

Put on the whole armour of God.

Reader 2:

Armour?
Who even knows what armour is these days?
Some metallic relic leftover from the Middle Ages – irrelevant and futile
in this age of germ warfare and threats of insidious terrorist acts.

Armour seems a naïve metaphor,
appropriate only for the ancient times of moats,
spears and arrows – not now.

I grant you that armour is tough and somewhat protective, but it is also cumbersome and extremely heavy.

In these days of duct tape and plastic over windows that leak in the lethal gasses, how do we wear the "now" of protective armour?

Reader 1:

The whole armour of God,
so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Reader 2:

So that we may stand.
You want us to be
firmly held to the ground of our faith.
I guess that armour would hold us down alright.
No wind of terror or time
would be able to move us.
But since it is Your armour, Oh God,
You could move us to stand.

Reader 1:

For our struggle is not against the 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.

Reader 2:

Oh God, you want us to stand against things we don't even comprehend;
And powerful people
who wield the weapons of punishment
over our heads.
To stand up against the wickedness of this age

against the insidious nature of evil hidden in our games, against our passive listening to the voices of violence in the media, pounding us with unclean ideas, unwholesome urging and consuming excess. To stand against those who walk us into the jaws of war and waste.

Reader 1:

Therefore, take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

Reader 2:

The whole armour.
Whatever that means to us now.
The idea of peace and non-resistance,
and the strength to invoke it;
The energy of sound theological understanding;
The integrity of the line of saints
that stands before us,
The compassion of one soul for another
The truth of teachings based on love
The calling in our hearts to follow You.

All:

We wait for you God.

We watch for your presence in our daily walk.

We witness your love and your compassion in our lives.

We want to journey with you beside us.

And at the end, we want to be with you,

having stood firm against the evils around us

knowing our hope is in You.

Reader 1:

And now, peace be to the whole community,
and love with faith, from God our Parent
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace be with all
who have an undying love
for our Lord Jesus Christ.

All:

Amen.

The whole armour of God

One of the things I remember with vivid clarity about working in the school office in Taiwan over a decade ago was “memory morning.”

In the grade 8 class, the students were required, as part of their religion class, to memorize scripture. Now the teacher was a firm believer in “long term memory.” She wanted every student to be able to carry the biblical passages with them in their permanent mental database.

So, the memorization began in September with a passage a week, and each student was required to recite it to someone in the school at the end of the week. We were all pressed into service as listeners. The janitors, doorman, business manager, secretaries, principal, and lunch ladies – everyone had students they listened to. However, each week the time commitment increased because the passages were added one to the next, and none was ever omitted.

By the end of the year “memory morning” really did feel like that. Our students would come and sit in front of us, reciting straight through for about 40 minutes. Now that may not sound like much right here, but believe me, if I recited for you what they routinely shared with us, you would be amazed.

When I asked the teacher how she chose scripture for them to memorize, she outlined

them as passages on which they could depend. One of the texts that I heard many times was the “whole armour of God” from Ephesians 6. Somehow the text made me smile, with its archaic imagery that conjured up the memory of Ron Loepky dressed up in tin foil armour to illustrate the passage. So it sticks in my mind. Ah, long-term memory.

Therefore, take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet, put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. 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. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

The word of God.

That was gift this teacher wanted to give each child. So lets take a quick look at the armour that she coveted for each of us. Sometimes I feel like it applies even more aptly these days, when many of our youth spend so much time in video-game land full of the mystery of yesteryear and magic of tomorrow.

The belt of truth

Truth is foundational - it defines what is false. Each of us, with this belt in place, can see the pitfalls around us. The game becomes clearer. The fragility of societal promises, like “put your trust in freedom 55” and all will be well, suddenly seem rather flimsy! The belt of truth can dispel the myths and allow for trust in God.

The breast-plate of righteousness

Righteousness is hard to spell. It is hard to define too. But the word “just” works too. When we act with righteousness, when we are just in our dealings, it wards off attack. When we act justly, we give no excuse for antagonism. In our relationships with other people, at work, at home, in the global community, justice allows us to stand on our convictions and on our understanding of God. We may not be “safe” but we are protected through the justice we exemplify.

Shoes on your feet

“Don’t you step on my blue suede shoes.”
“These boots are made for walk’in.” “In the shoes of the fishermen.” Shoes are symbolic of action. One needs the protection in cold weather. One needs protections from the rocks and glass on the road. God wants us to do whatever it is we need to do to get on with the Gospel – to spread the word – to give encouragement – to walk what we believe.

The Shield of Faith

Faith as a shield – we don’t often think of shields anymore except in the metaphoric sense. However, the shield is still a very graphic image. You can see the darts of evil hitting it and falling to the ground having caused little damage and allowing the person to remain standing. Faith protects, but it also guides. Like an onboard GPS, faith keeps you from error. Faith allows you to stay the course and not be waylaid or deterred by the forces that pull and push us all towards temptation.

The helmet of Salvation

On our heads, the place where we store knowledge and understanding, the brain – where our “personhood” is lodged – are enfolded by with the best gift – the protection and love of God through salvation. How fortunate are we to be loved in this way. And of course, after we look at the protective garments God asks us to put on; we look at what we are standing against.

The principalities and powers of darkness today are as real as they ever were. We face a myriad of elements that in and of themselves, don’t look too bad at the outset, and yet, if we incorporate them all into our lives, we put down the shielding and protection that God has prepared for us.

Individualism

Every person for him/herself! I’m number one! If I don’t look after myself, who will?” In this kind of thought is the idea that we do not need to be responsible for each other. And yet, in order to love God, we need to love our neighbour as ourselves. So individualism divides and conquers. Individualism also breeds the adversarial system. In politics, in work, in law and in business, it can cause everyone to be threatened by everyone else. *If someone else gets a job – I’ll lose mine – so I will work only for my own advancement and will be against everyone else.* Is this how righteousness works? The breastplate of righteousness is not a weapon to be removed and used against another it is to allow us to stand against the evils around us.

Pluralism

Today’s society embraces many beliefs, many cultures, and many find that this is enriching and enlightening. However, it can have another, darker, side. If each person, each culture, each religion thinks that their way is the only way – the absolute truth, and all others are punishably wrong – how do Christians live the love that God requires of us?

Materialism/consumerism

We live in an age of conspicuous consumerism. Christmas is coming – we know because the push is on. Stores, malls and advertisements push for us to buy more, get more, give more, go faster, acquire and get ahead. What we have is more important than what we are. How, with this swelling our heads, do we fit into that helmet of salvation?

Security/militarism

We have to build better walls! We need more fences. We need to protect our land, our economy, our country. We are called to put our faith in might. Where what we really need, is to put our might behind our faith, for our faith is our shield and our protection. Our safety cannot rest in anti-terrorism – the airport security type of shield – for we live in a world of persons – next to each other, skin to skin and we need to love each other and stand firmly within the shield that God has given us.

So, a decade ago, as I listened to the recitations of young people committing these precious words to memory, my own long-term memory and my vision was also molded and shaped. The experience was a gift. The words are a gift. And what can we do?

Therefore, take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil