



ARMED FORCES SUNDAY 2019

SERMON RESOURCE

**“FINALLY, BE STRONG IN THE LORD AND IN THE STRENGTH OF HIS MIGHT.
Put on the whole armor of God” (EPHESIANS 6:10–11).**

Understanding the battlefield and your enemy

Being prepared is always on the minds of our men and women serving so faithfully in our armed forces. There is not a day that goes by that they are not ready or training to be more ready. They have to be ready at a moment's notice to answer the call. Once the alarm sounds, they don't have time to “get ready” ... they need to “be ready.” And to “be ready,” they train, train and train some more. They train as they would fight. Our military leaders continue to ensure our personnel are ready for combat. The institution gets them physically and mentally prepared to make a defense of our country ... for the hope of freedom. The Navy SEAL motto is, “The only easy day was yesterday.” It is all about preparation and being ready to win our nation's battles. Abraham Lincoln once said, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.” Preparation and being ready are critical in any planning, but especially in planning a defense.

It is important to be reminded that we truly are living in the Church Militant. We are in a war with the devil, the world and our sinful nature. So I ask: Are you ready? Are you ready for the battles and suffering that you face every day? What is your plan to sustain you on the battlefield of suffering? How will you endure? What is your hope and confidence as you go into battle and suffering?

We can't kid ourselves. We live in a sin-sick world, surrounded by evil. In America, we may not yet be hauled out of our churches, our homes or our businesses by evil men who put us on our knees with a gun or sword at our head and yell, “Renounce Jesus or die!”

Yet, we know that in other parts of the world, this is happening even today. Christians are being executed and martyred daily for their faith. Here in our country, people are losing their jobs or positions for giving a defense of the faith and speaking out against issues that go contrary to the Word of God. We are being told to keep our religion in the church and out of the public square. Oh yes, they tell you that you have freedom to worship in your church, but don't bring it out into public. Hang your personal faith at the door on the way out of your house or church.

How often have we “given in” and stood by quietly in a discussion in the public square about cultural issues? Did you remain silent because you simply didn't want to be labeled a “bigot”, judgmental, narrow-minded or the proponent of “hate speech?” We don't want to suffer for what we believe. We want to be “liked” and “accepted.” It is not easy to stand strong in the Lord.

Or you may be saying, “Come on, Pastor. I am in the middle of a war right now with an illness, disease, broken relationship, guilt, depression, addiction ... We know what war looks like spiritually as well as physically.

“I have tried everything I can to fight ... to win ... yet the pain continues and I am stricken, smitten and afflicted.”

Does the enemy know the chink in your armor?

That is where Paul in our text points us to where we find our fortress, our help, our comfort, our armor. It is *not* within ourselves. We can't stand and fight alone.

The devil will find a chink in our armor and again bring us to despair and hopelessness. Even in physical war, we can give our troops the best equipment possible to protect them, yet day after day we see our troops killed in combat. Many are killed by shrapnel or bullets despite all their training, all their combat gear. The enemy found chinks in the armor.

My friends, the devil will do the same to us. He knows your temptations and your weaknesses. He will attack and attack where you are most vulnerable.

Whose armor is it?

Therefore, our Lord pleads with us to come to Him. In Psalm 46, we are reminded that God is our fortress, our refuge and strength. In our text, Paul reminds us that it is God's armor. It is God's armor that we wear in our spiritual warfare.

What is the ultimate goal of the enemy?

The ultimate goal of our enemy, the devil, and his evil schemes is to get you to hell with him. He wants you to doubt the Word of God. He wants you to doubt the promises of God. He wants you to lose all hope in Jesus and fall into hopelessness and despair.

Now we see the comfort and absolute power of this passage from the Word of God. “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 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. Therefore take up the whole armor of God” — NOT just parts of it (EPH. 6:10-13).

Why? So when the devil tries to tell you that you aren't good enough to be a child of God, or you are too evil for God to love

and die for, that Jesus couldn't have paid for your sins, your guilt, your evilness, you may be able to stand your ground.

To stand your ground, to stand firm ... God gives you His armor:

Belt of truth buckled around your waist

The truth is that God, who cannot lie, has promised you eternal life. When we live in a world where there seems to be no truth, we hold up our armor with the truth of God. God has promised you eternal life. God, who cannot lie, has promised that He has sent Jesus to live, to suffer, to die and to rise again for you! God, who cannot lie, promised that whoever is baptized and believes will be saved.

Breastplate of righteousness

We were dead in our sins and soiled by evil, yet God made the great exchange and gave us the robe of righteousness (the breastplate of righteousness). In your Baptism, God reached down into the muck and mire of your sinfulness and made you His child. He freely gives you His righteousness. He gives you forgiveness, life and salvation! No matter what accusations the devil throws your way about how bad you are or how good you may think you are, your righteousness is still like filthy rags. Yet our Lord gives us the breastplate of His righteousness. Jesus lived that perfect life for you and for me. Jesus kept the law perfectly for us and now imputes that righteousness to us and declares us "not guilty." The devil's darts of accusations can't penetrate the Lord's breastplate of righteousness, which you wear proudly.

Shield of faith

Then the Lord continues to give us more armor. He created faith in our hearts that clings to the truth of His promises, which clings to His Word of forgiveness, hope and healing. Faith that clings to the cross of Jesus Christ, which puts out the flaming arrows the devil shoots at us. Faith that was given to us in our Baptism and the Word of God. The Holy Spirit called us by the Gospel. That shield of faith resists the lies of the devil and clings to Jesus.

Helmet of salvation

By the grace of God, for Christ's sake, through faith, we are saved! That is our helmet that the Lord gives us. The helmet of salvation. Knowing that our faith is not in vain, that we are saved from the devil and hell. We know that our salvation is given to us freely by the grace of God, for Christ's sake, through faith.

Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God

Then our Lord gives us the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. That Word of God is a two-edged sword that beats back the devil and his lies. Jesus Himself used the Word of God as a sword to defeat Satan when He was tempted in the wilderness. God continues to give us the Word of God to pierce the devil, the world and our sinful flesh. As Luther so boldly proclaims, "One little word can fell him (the devil)" and "Get behind me Satan." God has given us a piece of armor that is both defensive and offensive in this spiritual warfare. There will be those who continue to doubt the Word of God, but not us. We know that the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit.

Feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace

Finally, we get to another piece of armor that many forget about or take for granted. The footwear. As any foot soldier or grunt Marine can tell you, it does matter what you have on your feet.

Without the proper protection, it is easy to slow down, lose your ground and not stand firm. The Lord is reminding us that because of all that we have just heard, we can believe and stand firm.

Now that we know we have the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God), we are ready to move out.

We are ready because we have the gospel of peace. What a powerful passage from the Word of God. This is that peace which passes all understanding ... it is the peace of God, knowing that we are forgiven, that we are saved, that we are redeemed children of God. The peace that gives us the strength to continue in this vale of tears, in this Church Militant, the present warfare. Because we know the end of the line. We know that we are forgiven children of God and that God who loves us will never leave us nor forsake us.

This is the peace that comes from knowing that all things work out for good and according to His purpose. The peace that comes even though we will continue to feel pain and sadness, struggle with our pet sins, experience pain in relationships, illness and disease, feel loneliness in the loss of loved ones. Yet, in all that, we will stand firm, trusting our Lord Jesus. Trusting that even as we live in a sin-sick world and all that comes with that, heaven is our home. Our Jesus has defeated our enemy and has given us the armor we need to endure until either our end comes or Jesus returns again on that Last Day. We move out and share that peace with our neighbors.

So, are you ready for war and suffering? Are you ready to face the temptations that befall you? Are you ready to face the pain that may come your way?

Yes! Yes! Yes, you are ready, because Jesus has made you ready by living, suffering, dying and rising ... for you! Jesus made you ready by giving you His armor. By the grace of God, for Christ's sake, through faith, you are ready for those attacks and suffering you will face. A faith that clings to the promises of God that you are a baptized, redeemed child of God. Your God-given faith clings to the cross of Christ for your salvation and will not allow the devil to give you doubt or despair, no matter how much pain and suffering you encounter. That is your hope and sure defense! Your hope is built on Jesus Christ and His righteousness. God is your fortress, a trusty shield and weapon!

*Provided by the Rev. Dr. Steven Hokana, assistant director,
LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces*

*The back page has been formatted to accommodate reproduction on a
5.5" x 8.5" Sunday bulletin.*

