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Pentecost 15

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Put on the Armor of God”

Text: Ephesians 6:10-20 (Mark 7:14-23)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Put on the whole armor of God.

So said St. Paul. So I started thinking about armor.

In Paul’s day, the word armor would have invoked thoughts of Roman soldiers in their protective vesture - helmets, breastplates, and shields. Well-prepared for battle.

Later, in medieval times, there were suits of armor, covering a person from the top of his head to the tips of his toes. An impenetrable covering to protect them.

Now days we have armor-plating on our tanks and warships, and the presidential limousine is armor-plated all around, providing a protective cocoon for the president wherever he goes.

Armor has a long history. To protect us against the enemies trying to hurt us.

But what if the enemy isn’t outside of you but inside of you? Then what? The armor does you no good. It could, in fact, hurt you. Trapping you inside, or giving you a false sense of security - thinking that you’re safe and so letting your guard down and making yourself, really, more vulnerable than ever.

So not just armor is needed, but the *right* armor. And to know the right armor, you have to know the enemy rightly. To know how to defend. To know what to defend.

And so for us, as Christians, the right armor is the ***armor of God***, because the enemy, Paul goes on to say, is not one that any armor of this world can defend against. ***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.*** The armor of this world can protect the body, but only the armor of God can protect the heart.

That was the point Jesus was making in the Holy Gospel we heard today. Those words

are a continuation of the Holy Gospel we heard last week, when the Pharisees were accusing the disciples of Jesus of not keeping the rules and traditions of the elders.

Wrong armor, Jesus is saying. Rules and traditions - how to wash, when to wash, what to eat, and things like that - they're not necessarily bad and maybe serve a purpose. But if you're depending on them or others kinds of good works to protect you or save you . . . **wrong armor**.

Because the truth is, you're being attacked from within. It is the unclean thoughts and desires that are lurking in your heart and in your mind - *evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness* - that are hurting you. Whether they come out in words and actions or not, they are doing their awful work. They are consuming you, corrupting you, corroding you, from the inside out.

So something else is needed. A different kind of armor.

But before we move onto that, consider how we do this, too - put on the wrong kind of armor - not just the Pharisees. The Pharisees did it with their rules and regulations and traditions, thinking this was the armor they needed that would protect them. How do we do it? How do you do it? Try to protect yourself. What barriers or wrong armor do we put up around us to keep those we think are hurting us out? Physical barriers, maybe. But more often, I think, emotional ones, walls around our hearts - excuses to protect our hurting conscience, attacking others to defend our pride, justifications to keep out accusations or condemnation. And what about denial? Or maybe we just separate ourselves and go into our own little cocoons.

But it doesn't work, does it? And then what? The barriers and wrong armor we've put up and put on then trap us instead of protect us. Our cocoon becomes our prison. Trapping us in despair, in doubt, in unbelief, in the very sin we were trying to protect ourselves from.

No, this kind of armor doesn't work. Romans soldiers were eventually defeated. There's a reason suits of armor aren't used anymore. Armor-plating cannot protect against electronic warfare. And presidents and other public figures have often been brought down how? From the sin within. From what has come from their own hearts.

So time, maybe, to try something new?

Put on the armor of God.

So I was thinking about armor, and *this kind* of armor, and a story popped into my head. The story of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Do you remember that story? David went out to fight the Philistine giant Goliath who seemed invincible. (And who, by the way, had

his own armor to protect him.) Yet David defeated him with just a stone and a sling. Goliath had mocked him for coming out with such weak weapons, but David knew what Goliath didn't know: **the right armor**.

For you see, that's not the whole story. Because something happened earlier in that story that is not a small detail, but actually pretty important in this context. When Saul finally decided to let David go out and fight Goliath, the first thing he did was tell David to put on his armor - Saul's armor, the king's armor, which was the best armor - to protect himself. And David tried, but it didn't fit. David was still a boy and Saul was a man of war. So David took it off. He wouldn't go into battle with this kind of armor, but with the armor of faith and truth. The armor of trusting in the Lord and His promises, rather than trusting in the strength of man.

It seemed stupid. It seemed foolish. It seemed like David was going to his death.

But David knew the battle wasn't really a physical one, but a spiritual one. Would they trust God and His promises to them? Would God fight for them? Only by taking OFF Saul's armor could David's put ON God's armor. For the armor that looked strong would, in truth, make David weak. But the armor that looked weak, made David strong.

So what about you and your life?

Put on the armor of God.

The truth is, the Good News is, you already have this armor! It was given you in your baptism when you were clothed - armored! - with Christ and His righteousness, His truth, His life, His forgiveness. The devil has nothing that can pierce that armor. He tried. He unleashed everything he had against Jesus, in His life and in His death . . . and so on that third day when the seal on the grave was broken and the tomb empty, he had nothing left. He was defeated. He was left empty-handed. His prey had gotten away.

And clothed - armored! - with Christ and His righteousness, His truth, His life, and His forgiveness, the devil has no hold on you either.

So to ***put on the armor of God***, as Paul says here, is to put on Christ. To live in the promises of Christ given you in your baptism.

Which means not to deny your sin, or deny that what you're doing is sin, or try to justify your sin - **wrong armor!** But confess your sin, because you have the promise of forgiveness. **Right armor**.

Which means not to go along with the opinions of others or what the world or culture today says is good and right - **wrong armor!** That might seem safer for the moment, but

the opinions and thoughts and things of this world come and go, change, and will finally leave you wondering if there's any truth at all! But the Word of the Lord and the truth of His Word last forever (1 Peter 1:24-25; Isaiah 40:6-8). **Right armor.**

To put on the armor of God means not to rely on yourself and what you can do - **wrong armor!** But rely on Christ and what He has done for you. **Right armor.**

It means not to hide or separate yourself from others - **wrong armor!** That's armor that just causes fear and despair and bitterness to be locked up in your heart. But do good to those who persecute you, forgive them, pray for those who hurt you, love those who hate you. **Right armor.**

It means not to try to clean yourself up and come before God as somebody He *should* love - **wrong armor!** But rather come as the sinner you are and pray (as we did in the Introit today): *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me* (Psalm 51:10). For whenever God creates, it is always from nothing. In the beginning, God spoke and it came to be. And now, too, God speaks and it is. The Word preached, proclaimed, washed, and fed to us. Making us new creations. **Right armor.**

You get it?

It's not easy. Paul was in chains as he wrote these words. But clothed with Christ, armored with Christ, he knew he was safe. He knew he was secure. He knew he was in the **right armor**. Even when the sword came down upon his neck and his now bodyless head fell to the ground, His armor - the righteousness, truth, life, and forgiveness of Christ - protected him and saved him. Death just took him from this life to the next.

That's pretty good armor!

So what do you think? Want that kind of armor? You already have it! You are a baptized child of God. So do not be afraid, even if you're staring down a Goliath of a problem or issue in your life! Take off the armor you've been relying on, that's weighing you down and not really working anyway. And **put on the armor of God**. The armor of Christ - His Word, His forgiveness, His life. That's the right armor. Maybe it looks weaker and you think it weaker. But if so, then remember these words, also from the apostle Paul: *when I am weak, then I am strong* (2 Corinthians 12:10).

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.