

We talked last week about how we have been troubled  
We feel it in our bodies—whether sick or things just feel off  
We recognized that while it presents as political, it is actually spiritual  
And that evil has been given a new permission to make chaos in our world  
While we know that Light overcomes the darkness—we recognize that we need “flashlights”  
Tools that help us navigate in the darkness

There is a passage of Scripture that speaks directly to this issue—Ephesians 6:10-18a

*We aren't fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens. (vs. 12)*

This is exactly what we named last week  
It is a spiritual problem—so we need to know how to prepare ourselves for this darkness  
What tools do we have available when the darkness closes in?  
Like when the lights in the house go out—knowing exactly how to find the flashlight

Paul uses the imagery of the Roman soldier—who always went into battle prepared and protected  
While this may be an image that is unfamiliar to us—it makes sense to be prepared  
We would never leave the house without clothing  
We get ready for what we are going to do when we're out—the appropriate clothing  
I'm reminded of my pastor Stan Thornburg who said that we must pray a prayer of protection

First he tells us to take a stand—stand up—take your place  
There are times when I know that *this* is mine to do—I feel myself stand up and do what is mine  
Whether I physically stand or not—there is a rising in me that “stands” and takes my place  
In that standing—I recognize that I have (or will be given) what I need in the moment—I can do this  
I am not alone—it is as if Jesus is my spine, my strength  
You are not alone and you will be given what you need in that moment

Then Paul tells us what to put on—there are 6 things  
But of those 6 things—5 are passive and for protection—only one is active  
Also, they are things we put on our bodies—they are external garments we receive and put on  
They aren't something innate within us that's supposed to appear

The belt of truth  
This goes on first—it holds everything in place—it is a core piece—although probably not seen  
Truth—we have to tell the truth about the situation—this is always the place to begin  
Tell the full truth about the situation—about me—about God—about it all  
If we don't fully tell the truth, we are left defenseless  
God cannot work in untruth  
Tell the truth—what do I know to be true in this place and time?

The breastplate of justice  
This is commonly called the breastplate of righteousness  
So we immediately assume it is about being right—I must be on the right side of Truth  
I have to know Truth with a capital T—by that I mean Theological Truth  
Also, that I must be pure and have it all together as a righteous person—be virtuous/moral  
But this isn't what Paul is talking about

First, this is something we put on—something external that we pick up and put on our body  
So, we are picking up and putting on the righteousness of Christ—it protects us  
It isn't an aggressive tool, but it covers the core of my body—internal organs  
It protects my vulnerability

Second, I learned that righteousness in this case is synonymous with justice  
A number of translations use the breastplate of justice  
We pick up and wear the breastplate of God's justice  
God is in the world, reconciling the world to himself  
The fundamental justice and goodness of God protects our vulnerability  
I'm reminded of a favorite verse in the Psalms  
*Commit your way to the Lord! Trust him! He will act and will make your  
righteousness shine like the dawn, your justice like high noon. Psalm 37:5-6*

So, how do I live into this justice of God?  
I think, like being righteous ourselves, we assume we are to do the justice—enact justice  
Rather, I'm struck that we put on God's justice  
I think we live into the justice and goodness of God by "practicing goodness"  
It is how we align ourselves with God's justice and goodness  
We make it our habit by practicing goodness in the everyday—all the time—places  
It isn't a tool used solely in the darkness—but something familiar and practiced

Shoes so you are ready to spread the good news of peace  
I'm thinking these are sturdy shoes—these shoes are made for walking!  
But this one is very interesting to me—it isn't shoes to carry you into conquering the enemy  
Or even spreading the good news of Truth—that would sound more reasonable  
We are to wear shoes so we are ready to go and can navigate whatever terrain  
We are to spread the good news of peace  
In this battle, we are to spread the good news of peace—sounds Quaker to me!  
I'm reminded of this verse in Isaiah—which is also a familiar chorus...  
*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of a messenger who proclaims  
peace, who brings good news, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your  
God rules!" Isaiah 52:7*

This is what we are to be about—this is what we are to proclaim and tell people  
My shoes allow me to go where I need to go, even in rough terrain—but it is to proclaim peace!

Carry the shield of faith

Again, we often think of our faith as our beliefs—then it would be our beliefs that protect us  
But the word used here is one of faithfulness or steadfastness  
Again, we have practice at using the shield of faith because we are a faithful people  
We are faithful in good times and hard times—we persevere and are steady  
I think this is really more akin to trust—we put our trust in God to extinguish the arrows  
It is this trust that we faithfully hold up as our shield

We take the helmet of salvation

The helmet is sturdy and covers our head—it protects our head  
The Roman helmet was heavy and even protected the cheeks—it was comprehensive  
Salvation—the church has made this all about accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior  
So I hear, "Are you saved? If yes, you will be protected."  
But God comes to all of us no matter what we have decided—so trust that God is present

Salvation is simply choosing to align myself with God and take on God's righteousness  
Trusting God to lead me through the difficult places  
The word salvation that is used here means safety or soundness  
It is back to the nudges—if I follow God's nudges, I can navigate difficult terrain  
Patty once likened salvation to having Spirit guide her across a minefield safely

Ultimately we get to the sword of the Spirit

The only active item we take with us in all of this is the sword of the Spirit  
The Spirit goes before us and penetrates the darkness  
Again, it isn't us—we aren't the ones using the sword to bring Light  
The one active thing we carry is the sword of the Spirit  
Paul goes on to say, "which is God's word" or the word of God  
Again, the evangelical church has made the word of God synonymous with the Bible  
But they didn't even have the whole Bible when Paul said this  
The word is the spoken word—the word through which God created  
*God said, "Let there be light." And so light appeared. Genesis 1:3*  
Interestingly in looking "word" up, it is equated with a saying, speech, matter, thing  
The word of God has substance—it is matter or a thing—it goes forth  
It is embodied in the Spirit

We end this section with the reminder to pray in the Spirit at all times

*In the same way, the Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don't know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans. Romans 8:26*

Pray in the Spirit

Let the Spirit pray through you and for you  
When you don't know what to do—pray in the Spirit  
If you have a prayer language, use that  
If you don't, it doesn't mean you are less of a Spirit filled person  
Simply let your cry of help and your groans become prayers  
As words or utterances come, let them be spoken—trust what comes

God is faithful to walk with us in all situations

We are not alone and you will be given what you need to be faithful