

This Is The Way

Well, you've gotta love it when the boss goes on vacation and leaves you a really relatable scripture to preach on, like this one about... armor. I'm looking around to see how many of y'all came to church wearing armor today and... yeeeeeeeeeah, nobody.

Paul uses this wonderful imagery in Ephesians chapter 6 but all its meaning doesn't hit us the way it would if we were more familiar with armor in our everyday lives. Most of us are unfamiliar enough with armor if we don't even hear and register all the pieces that Paul mentions, or notice some of the pieces he leaves out.

I used to have an image as the desktop wallpaper on my office computer. And I'll show it at the 11:00 service on the screens. Y'all probably can't see it, but this the image and it's a guy in some armor. He's got his shoes and his breastplate and his belt and his helmet and his sword, but

underneath it, he's wearing some gym shorts. And the text here says "The armor of God has no pants." It's funny because we don't notice stuff like that at first glance. The armor Paul is describing would have been worn by people who also had on something that we'd think of as a robe. And they'd sort of wrap it up and



keep it together with their belt, and this is what they're talking about in the Old Testament when people are told to gird up their loins, it's not about using armor to protect anything, but about getting a robe out of the way of their knees and legs so they'd be able to run into battle. We don't tend to picture somebody in a robe when we think of armor, we're more familiar with the full plate armor we see in movies about the Middle Ages or in sword-and-sorcery kind of shows. And so I like this "armor of God has no pants" image because yes, it makes this passage humorous and hopefully memorable, but it also reminds me of what the armor of God is and reminds me what it isn't.

Because even this kind of armor would have probably not been something Paul's audience would have been putting on themselves. They'd certainly have seen the Romans and the military forces around them in their time in their part of the world wearing this kind of stuff. But everybody in the first century wasn't walking around with breastplates and helmets and swords. Armor would have been expensive

and out of reach to most of them, and as unnecessary for daily life to them as it is to us. Paul is using imagery that they'd hear and think -the same way we do- "that sounds like kind of an ordeal"

One of the shows I've watched recently where somebody has armor is the Star Wars TV show *The Mandalorian*. The main character, the Mandalorian, has to have his armor on all the time, he can't ever be seen without it. And that's kind of an ordeal by itself, when he needs to prove his identity, or just eat and other people are around. But part of the plot is him acquiring more and more of the material to make it, getting more *beskar* steel to make armor piece by piece. So it's a bit of an ordeal for him to even *have* armor, this armor that's necessary for him to be a part of a group, it's necessary to keep him safe in his very dangerous line of work, and because there's this tension around the armor sometimes he needs reminding, he needs reassurance, and another Mandalorian will say to him or he will say to himself "this is the way." It's the group's creed, but it's also this expression of "I know who I am... **this is the way** to be me... I know what I need to do... **this is the way** to do it... I know who I to whom belong... **this is the way** to show it."

God's armor sounds like a bit of an ordeal when Paul just lists it off like this. I mean it sounds cool too, and if you were here for Vacation Bible School last month, you got to see some of our youngest disciples around here at Soapstone wearing their color-coded armor as our theme was around these very verses. Their armor was made out of fabric and we got to decorate and personalize it at the VBS kick-off, so the kids definitely had a better time than if we'd made them put on steel helmets and breastplates and walk around with heavy shields. And good thing Paul isn't telling us to do that either. We have a lot better time putting on this metaphorical armor than we would all those things for real, but even metaphorical armor sounds like a lot of work to put on sometimes.

When *that person* texts me and says "What are you doing?" and I know that if I say "nothing," they're going to ask me to do something... it seems like work in those times to put on that belt of truth and give them a straight answer. When we're in month number 22 of a global health crisis and over and over day after day I need to pick up the shield of faith and trust there's ever going to be an end to it... It seems like a lot to put on by myself.

I think of another show I've watched where people are always wearing armor, and that's *Game of Thrones*. There are a couple of characters in the show who both desperately want to be knights. Brienne of Tarth wants to put on her armor and be a knight but nobody will let her be a knight because she's a woman. And Podrick Payne wants to put in his armor and be a knight but nobody will let him be a knight

because he's kind of useless. And so Brienne isn't sure what her path to knighthood is except to just be the toughest person in any group. And Podrick is sure that his path to knighthood is to be a squire, but nobody else really wants him, and the two of them wind up as travelling companions, Pod enthusiastically but ineptly squiring for Brienne who very reluctantly drags him along on her quests. And one of my favorite scenes with the two of them has Brienne struggling alone with her armor and Pod runs over to help with the straps and Brienne at first is her usual self, trying to be tough, and she angrily shoos him away. But after they sit and speak together honestly for a while about their struggles, Brienne finally gives in and says "Alright, help me with these straps," and Pod is beaming from ear to ear as he gets to make her life a little easier.

Putting on the armor isn't supposed to be an ordeal. It's supposed to make things easier for us. Because we get to the end of this big old list of armor, of shoes and belts and breastplates and helmets and shields and swords; of truth and righteousness and peace and faith and salvation... and what have we been getting geared up for? It's not been getting geared up to battle. It's getting geared up to pray.

Paul gets to verse 18 and says to pray. Pray at all times, pray in supplication. I'm a youth pastor so I tell you what the big words mean, and supplication just means to ask for something. But I'm a youth pastor and sometimes I tell you what the little words mean and "pray" just means talk to God. At youth group when somebody volunteers to pray but then has that moment when they realize "wait... I don't know what to say," I always just tell them "Just talk to God." I don't care if you start with "Dear God," or end with "Amen." I don't care if you follow the pattern of how a Collect is written or if you use one of those pneumonics like A.C.T.S. – Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication- to hit all of the bases, to remember all the things you're "supposed" to say in a prayer... I can't speak for God but I'm guessing he doesn't really care about those formalities either. I do know he cares about us wanting to talk to him, wanting to ask him for things, wanting to be in relationship with him, wanting to be like him. And I can tell that because all these things Paul tells us to put on, all these things that God wants us to put on, they are characteristics of God himself. God is the source of our truth, God is the epitome of righteousness, God is the embodiment of our Salvation. The armor imagery is just a reminder.

So what are *our* reminders? If we don't leave the house each day with our helmets and our weapons, what are our reminders to put on the characteristics of God? They probably look different from one person to the next. Maybe we need to decide that some of the things we put on every day are reminders of God's characteristics in our lives. Today is backpack blessing Sunday, so I think of all the students who have been going back to school the last couple of weeks and the many students who will

go back to school this week coming up in particular, and all the things that help us gear up for a school day.

Maybe we go to school with the backpack of truth, and are reminded not to use excuses like “the dog ate my homework,” and know that reconciliation with God and with others starts with being honest. Maybe with all the mandates coming back, we put on our face mask of righteousness and know keeping persons besides just ourselves safe is an act of justice toward our neighbors. Maybe with the resurgence of Crocs as a fashion statement during the pandemic we can look down at our holey- H.O.L.E.Y. – shoes and know that when God is with us, then wherever we go is a holy – H.O.L.Y.- space. Maybe it’s our lunchbox of faith that reminds us of love God and others have for us, our hair gel of Salvation that tells us from top to bottom we are covered in God’s grace, our Chromebook of the Spirit where we can look up the Word of God when we need it, maybe it’s the bag tag of prayer, that reminds us to talk to God, and reminds us that others in this congregation have been and are talking to God on our behalf. The important part is that we have those reminders. The important part is that we put on those things of God, that we gear up and go with God, and let God beam from ear to ear like Podrick Payne as he lightens our load.

At Pilgrimage each year and at some of our other Conference Youth Events, we do a song with motions, and we lately have called it the “Rick Moser dance” after the Reverend Rick Moser who taught it to the Conference. It’s basically the hand jive and a few other dance moves set to the 1979 song “What I Like About You” by The Romantics. But many moons ago when I was in high school and going to Pilgrimage as a youth, the Reverend Chris Hughes would lead that song and he’d refer to it as doing our “Christian calisthenics.” Now there’s nothing inherently Christian about any of the dance moves or the song, but if you do the dance the whole time it is a bit of a workout. And his joke was always that we do our Christian Calisthenics so we can be “firm believers.” Yeah, it’s a bad pun. But again, it’s memorable. And it’s what I think of in verse 13 of this chapter when Paul says for us to stand firm. That maybe putting on the armor of God isn’t an ordeal. It’s a workout. It’s the spiritual practice, the holy habit that gets us in shape to stand firm, that gets us in shape to go to God in prayer, the reminder that God lightens our load.

Righteousness? **This is the way** that I know who I am.

Faith? **This is the way** to do it.

Proclaiming peace? **This is the way** I show to whom I belong.

Glory to God. Amen.