

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
Ephesians 6:10-20
August 22-23, 2009

“Ready for Battle”

The Invasion of Normandy, known as D-Day, occurred on June 6, 1944 – a milestone day within living memory for many people still today. This operation was the largest single-day amphibious invasion of all time, and was the turning point in World War II that led to victory for the Allied Forces. Addressing his troops prior to the invasion, General Dwight D. Eisenhower spoke of the hard reality that was before them: “Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped, and battle hardened. He will fight savagely” (www.worldwar-2.net). Like a seasoned general addressing his troops before battle, in today’s Second (Epistle) Lesson Paul the apostle speaks to believers of the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged – the hard reality that is before us. Paul provides holy wisdom and godly counsel about how we are to prepare ourselves and engage the enemy. Our summer preaching series, “Walking by Faith,” continues today as we focus on the Word of God found in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians under the theme, “Ready for Battle.” May the Lord’s rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus’ sake.

As we walk by faith and approach this subject, it is vitally important to hold on to the truth that the victory has already been won by Christ. When the Lord Jesus cried out in his final agony on the cross: **“It is finished”** (John 19:30), the defeat of Satan, of sin and death and hell – all the forces opposed to God and his kingdom – was finished, once for all. Jesus’ willing sacrifice of his life upon the tree of the cross broke the strangle-hold of Satan’s power. Though they have been defeated, these enemy forces are still on the loose and they are still capable of exerting tremendous power and influence in the world for evil. As C.S. Lewis, the great writer and Christian apologist, wrote: “There is no neutral ground in the universe; every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.” The usual weapons of battle that we normally think of for war – guns, ammunition, grenades, tanks – don’t cut it. This isn’t physical warfare, or even psychological warfare; it is *spiritual* warfare, as Paul tells us: **“For our struggle is not against 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”** (Eph. 6:12). Evil in the world is real – corruption, greed, violence, exploitation, injustice, just to name a few – but these are a mask, a front, for the cosmic forces of evil that are behind them and control them. These cosmic forces of evil deeply affect the society in which we live. That is the point that General Paul is making here as he prepares his troops for battle.

Paul makes clear the tension between the victory already won against evil and the continuing influence of that evil in the present world. The truth is that believers in Christ will ultimately triumph because Christ has triumphed. For now, there remain skirmishes as the enemy seeks to inflict damage and destruction, knowing that his defeat is accomplished. *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, by C.S. Lewis, both in book form and the motion picture, give a compelling and accurate portrayal of what this looks like. In daily life, believers are called to have the conduct and demeanor of armed soldiers of God. The battle is spiritual, not physical. Our stance is not engaging evil in violent acts, but resisting evil and its influence with the whole armor of God: the belt of truth (God’s Word is truth – John 17:17), the breastplate of righteousness (the robe of righteousness – Isaiah 61:10), shoes of the Gospel of peace (the peace of Christ – Romans 5:1), the shield of faith (the shield of God’s favor – Psalm 5:12), the helmet of salvation (salvation is in Christ alone – Acts 4:12), and the sword of the Spirit, the Word of

God (God's Word gives light – Psalm 119:105). Paul's use of these weapons mirror what a first-century A.D. Roman foot soldier would have been familiar with. There is a difference between these last two and what comes before them. Salvation and the Word of God are what God gives, and the believer receives, just as that first-century Roman soldier would have received from his attendant the two final pieces of weaponry before battle: his helmet and his sword. That word here refers to using the spoken Word of God as a means to repel the enemy's attacks, even as the Lord Jesus did in his temptation in the desert (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; and Luke 4:1-13). So when we put all of these together: truth, righteousness, the Gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God – these are our weapons for spiritual warfare, and they are powerful, more so than anything the enemy has. Luther grasped this and captured it in his powerful hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 229). Stanza 3 is especially appropriate:

*Though hordes of devils fill the land, all threat'ning to devour us,
We tremble not, unmoved we stand; they cannot overpower us.
Let this world's tyrant rage; in battle we'll engage!
His might is doomed to fail; God's judgment must prevail!
One little word subdues him.*

My friends, that "one little word" is Jesus – that name which is above every name, **"that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"** (Philippians 2:10-11). We do not yet see this in its full and final sense, but we shall! Being so equipped with God's own virtues, having received the benefits of salvation and the Word of God, we are called to turn our attention to prayer, as General Paul tells us: at all times, keeping alert, persevering (Ephesians 6:18). Paul closes with the great irony that though he is God's official representative, his ambassador, he is an ambassador in chains. Think of that irony in terms of the role that ambassadors continue to have today through our State Department, and what an outrage there would be if any nation's ambassador would be in chains. In the midst of this, Paul asks for the prayer support of the Ephesian believers as he anticipates going to Rome, and God willing, standing before the Roman emperor and his court to present the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. Paul's desire is that in the midst of spiritual warfare he may **"declare it boldly"** (Eph. 6:20).

As baptized believers in Christ Jesus, we are all "high profile targets" of the enemy; his sights are trained on us and we are within his cross-hairs. At times we may be tempted, like many of Jesus' disciples were in today's Gospel lesson (John 6:56-69), to turn back and no longer follow him; to throw in the towel and just give up. And so we might well ask ourselves that same question Jesus asked the twelve: **"Do you also wish to go away?"** (John 6:67). With Christ our Captain before us, behind us, beside us, below us and above us, we say with Peter: **"Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God"** (John 6:68-69). Amen.