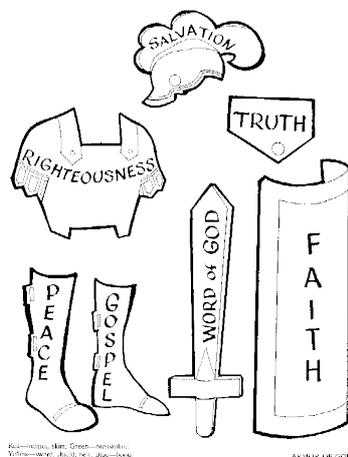


Worship at Home St Stephens UCA August 22, 2021

Theme: Put on the whole armour of God



Morning Prayer

Gracious God, we come to worship you in unity of spirit, although we are in separate places. Be present with us. Help us to put aside our sorrows and uncertainties. Open our hearts and minds to your unfailing love and strength. We thank you for the many blessings that are ours even in these difficult times. Forgive our faults and frailties, enable us to live as your followers. Your mercies are new every morning. Amen

Acknowledgment of country

We acknowledge that we gather on the land and waterways of the Traditional Custodians, the Yalukit-William and Bunurong Peoples of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

Ministry of the word Ephesians 6: 10-20. Put on the whole armour of God

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For 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. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶With all of these, * take the shield of **faith**, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, * ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Reflection

Today's lectionary reading concludes the encouraging and practical letter of Paul, to the Ephesians and other early church communities. It calls Christians to 'put on the whole armour of God' to struggle with, and stand firm against the forces of evil in the world, (in New Testament

times, understood in different ways to modern thinking), but evil is still real in our time. The powers of evil dehumanise, destroy, oppose love, justice, peace and community, and are hostile to Christ and new life in the Spirit. Although these powers have been overcome by God, through the death and resurrection of Christ, they remain active in the present world.

The image of the soldier, somewhat curious, now, but still relevant, is cleverly used to show what is required for defence and standing firm as Christians rather than going on the attack. The 'strength of Christ's power' is suffering love, not violence.

First, there is the belt of truth that holds things together, the trustworthy faithfulness of God; then the breastplate of righteousness protecting the heart, that is not self righteousness, but a motivating belief in God's justifying act of reconciliation through Christ.

Then put on your feet whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace, the good news. Going out on active service is suggested here.

Take the shield of faith as defence against the stings of ridicule, hostility, apathy, uncertainty, sorrow, the pressure of other options, or going it alone.

And finally put on the helmet of salvation and wield the sword of the spirit.

The helmet protects the head, the mind. Christ's salvation offers us healing and new ways of living, a framework for values and action. But how easily we are diverted and inclined to do it our way. Our minds are essential to thinking through issues, working out what is important, how to balance mind and heart and how we should behave. St Paul, in his letter to the Romans 12:2 has some good advice about the mind in our new life in Christ.

'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good, acceptable and perfect.'

Every hour of the day we are bombarded with news and forums on the media platforms - views, opinions, conversations, attitudes, allegiances, criticisms, schemes, enticements, praise and blame, the need to be informed and make decisions. Sometimes we are worn down and confused, or put matters in the 'too hard basket' but we have a Christian framework in which to weigh up all that is happening.

William Blake is his wonderful poem, 'Jerusalem', set to music, takes on commitment of the mind

'I will not cease from mental fight, nor shall my sword sleep in my hand. Till we have built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land.'

The sword, the Word of God, (not necessarily the Bible) is the creative enabling Holy Spirit at work.

Our world is troubled and divided. We need the armour of God to stand firm. So put on truth, have confidence in God's saving work, encourage peace, invite the Spirit of Christ to dwell within, and continue to be transformed by the renewal of our minds.

Then prepared to stand firm, we are called to pray in the Spirit for others in the community, alert and persevering, so that all are strengthened.

Prayers for others

Merciful God, you have called us to pray for others and to help and share where we can. Our world is in turmoil and distress in many ways. We pray for healing, peace and safety and enough resources to live. Uphold all those who work on the frontlines. Keep them safe. We pray for good governance and wise decision making. Give patience and inspiration to all who have the care and responsibility for families and community members. Comfort those who mourn, be near to those who are sick in body, mind and spirit. We bring to you those who are on our minds and in our hearts. Keep us in your grace, help us to live one day at a time trusting in your strength and care. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen

Hymn Tis 547 Be Thou my vision TiS 547

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
naught be all else to me save that thou art;
thou my best thought by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word.
I ever with thee and thou with me Lord;
thou my great Father, thy child let me be,
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my armour, my sword for the fight,
be thou my dignity, thou my delight;
thou my soul's shelter, and thou my high tower,
raise thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.

Riches I scorn and the world's empty praise,
thou mine inheritance now and always:
thou and thou only first in my heart;
high King of Heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven after victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun.
heart of my own heart, whatever befall;
still be my vision thou ruler of all.

Blessing Ephesians 6: 23 -24²³ Peace be to the whole community, * and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.*