The First Congregational Church of Plainfield
August 26, 2012
Sermon Title: “Dressed for Success”

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-20

The Whole Armour of God

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 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. 13 Therefore 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. 14 Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. 15 As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.

16 With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take 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. 19 Pray 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, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Do you realize that we live in a hostile world? Sometimes the enemy is not seen or heard or recognized which makes that enemy even more insidious. We pray for our military because we know that physically they are in harm’s way but do we pray for those who stand up for their faith day in and day out – every single one of us? Do we even think of the threat that each and every faithful person faces each day? We are all in harm’s way. We all face spiritual warfare from within and from without.

As Americans, we have been enculturated – a big word that means “the process by which a person learns the requirements of the culture by which he or she is surrounded, and acquires values and behaviors that are appropriate or necessary in that culture.” We are enculturated to be flexible, to bend, not to buck the
system, to go with the flow. We are taught, sometimes subtly, sometimes boldly, to blend in or face the consequences. What are the consequences? Well, that depends on what you value. If you value being popular then certainly not agreeing with your fans will prove to be painful. If you value being powerful then bucking the system might cause you to appear weak and maybe a bit eccentric. If you value acceptance and affirmations then standing firm for your beliefs might cause you to be rejected and even insulted. What other ways can you think of that you are manipulated by your surroundings?

What is the following a definition of?

“A form of aggressive behavior ....it can include verbal harassment, physical assault or coercion and may be directed repeatedly towards particular victims, perhaps on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexuality, or ability. The "imbalance of power" may be social power and/or physical power. It consists of three basic types of abuse – emotional, verbal, and physical. (This last sentence strikes at the heart of our discussion today) It typically involves subtle methods of coercion such as intimidation.”

This definition is that of bullying. We hear a lot about bullying these days. I consider the underlying current of our society, today and historically, to be a form of bullying. The attitude of much of our nation has become so determined to be tolerant that it has become intolerant. Intolerant of those who do not tolerate everything in order to "go with the flow."

Paul, in our reading today, is telling us that if we don't stand firm for our faith, we will stand for nothing. We are fighting battles everyday of spiritual warfare with the forces of evil and destruction that are seen and that are unseen. Call it what you will - evil, the adversary, the devil, Satan - whatever “it” is, it is destructive and wants to pull you away from God and your relationship with God.

So Paul tells us how, if we want to stand up for our Christian faith, to dress for success. In your bulletin today there is an insert of a Roman soldier. This image would have been readily in the minds of the Ephesians as they received Paul's letter. So he used what was familiar to build a very powerful analogy of how they could and how we can use God's armor, God's protection to stand firmly in the right attitude toward our godly mission - the opposite of “going with the flow.” Which does not mean being stubborn and contrary for the sake of being stubborn and contrary. If we rely on God's wisdom we will know the difference. Before we can know the difference we must be aware. God calls us to be aware and discerning of the paths we take versus the paths that are available.
“Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist” - the truth that ties everything together. “And put on the breastplate of righteousness” - the protective covering that guards our hearts, the center of decency and integrity. “With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one” - a strong faith is our shield, God will strengthen you and protect you, and your faith will withstand anything that is shot at it. “Take the helmet of salvation” - The overall trust that God will protect you. I also consider the helmet of my salvation to be that God will provide me with protection against the onslaught of my own mind; God will rescue me even from myself. And finally, “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” - when we need to pierce through the grey cloud of chaos that we find ourselves enveloped in, we can always go to God's word for clarity, strength, comfort and peace. God's promises will carry us through; God's mercy is fresh every day.

Like any battle, to win we must be prepared. Smart preparation for battle requires knowing what you stand for, being knowledgeable about your protective gear and weapons and being supported by others who will fight alongside of you and care for you when you're wounded. A spiritual battle requires no less. For a spiritual battle, we must gird ourselves spiritually with the full armor of God, which requires knowing and trusting God's word, being truthful, maintaining integrity, and relying on our faith. The full armor of God will protect us in any battle. But never forget that God has also given us each other, a family of faith to fight alongside us and care for us.

A beautiful poem "The Whole Armor"

We are to put on the "Whole Armor of God,"
And having done so - stand,
As the forces of evil seek to destroy
God’s work and perfect plan.
We gird ourselves with the "Truth"-
Christ Jesus - Lord of all;
And as our minds are stayed on Him,
We’re safe whatever befall.
We put on the "Breastplate of Righteousness"
As we face the daily fight,
Shunning all the works of iniquity,
Standing for what is right.
Our feet are shod with the "Gospel of Peace"
As we walk on the battle ground,
Leaving footprints for others to follow,
That true peace would be found.
We take with us the "Shield of Faith",
Trusting God each day -
Defense against the fiery darts
Satan sends our way.
We take the "Helmet of Salvation"
For protection of the mind -
A guard against all accusations,
And a witness to the spiritually blind.
We take the "Sword of the Spirit",
Just as Moses took the rod;
It is the most powerful tool upon the earth -
The Word of The Living God.
When we wear this spiritual armor,
We’re prepared for any battle that comes our way;
"No weapon formed against us shall prosper" -
God gives us victory every day. iii

Let’s think about that. Amen.

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iii Poem by Connie Campbell Bratcher