

Scriptures:

Psalm 84

Ephesians 6:10-20

Kingdom Armour

One of the very first scriptures I memorized as a child was Ephesians 6:10-20. One of my favourite contemporary praise songs is Psalm 84 so as I read both of these this week my mind quickly began to reminisce of days gone by. I can see myself standing in that little Sunday school room in the basement of an old house converted to a church reciting my verses. There is a lot I have had to let go of from the tradition I grew up in but I do hold an appreciation for how some scriptures were written on my heart. I am sure it has a very different meaning for me today than it did back when I first soaked it in but the image is one that I still find easy to play with.

As someone who dreams of a peace-filled world imagining putting on an amour like that of Sir Lancelot does not warm the cockles of my heart but If I imagine myself clothed in Holy presence that helps me envision dwelling in God's courts. My personality is also such that although I personally believe there is 'evil' in the world and spiritual forces at play in many dimensions I would rather focus on how I/we make the world a better place than focus on the fears or the negatives. Fear and negativity are paralyzing and so much of our world thrives on the drama of and eventually dies in that mindset.

I'd rather focus on dwelling in the holy and to do so I likely am going to need to be prepared to do it. That is what the armour means for me.

In the book of Ephesians, it says that we are fighting with the powers of darkness, the powers of evil, that both live inside and around us. "We are not fighting simply with our own egos, our own selfishness. We are not fighting simply with our own flesh, with our own little addictions and passions. We are not merely fighting petty battles with booze or drugs or sex and material pleasures, important as these are. No, the Bible says that we are fighting with an evil force greater than ourselves, the very powers of darkness. Who causes all the wars around us and around all of human history? Who causes all the starvation in the world, where a vast majority do not have sufficient food and water, and all the while there is plenty of food and water available? Who slaughtered children and parents in the death camps of Germany and Cambodia and Argentina? It is the power of Evil. It certainly isn't God who has caused all these enormous devastation around the globe. The power of evil is insidious, global, and there is no place to escape it."¹

¹ http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/books_ephesians_armor.htm

Now bear with me for just a moment because this is getting dark but in all honesty sometimes it has too because for us here in Canada it is really easy to push aside and say 'the rest of the world is in a bad way.' We do that in the face of evil throughout our world because we can. There is such a big self-care movement here in North American and don't get me wrong I daily am striving to get better at that but it is one of the ways we make sanctuaries of self so as to ignore the needs in the world around us. If we have the illusion that our world is perfect than perhaps the rest will be too. And so we create worlds of pleasure, sanctuaries in our own little areas. We live in the safety of our homes and our neighbourhoods and if we ever see something off we quickly try to stamp it out and get rid of it. If someone or something gets dangerous in our suburbia or the poor move in we will move to a safer suburb, to a safer church, to a safer island. It's human nature.

Rev Edward Marquart wrote "the Snake actually was found in the Garden of Eden, and the Snake is working invisibly in our little gardens, in our spiritual suburbs. And for some strange reason, we become apathetic. Yes, we become apathetic to the world around us where actual human beings are refugees, with little water and little food and little security."² Apathetic to the homeless on our streets. Apathetic to the lonely folks in our neighbourhood. Apathetic to all in need who require our time and possessions and love, and so we put our blinders on so that we don't see them or see them only on television, safely away from us and the real world. "That's what we do: create spiritual suburbs and islands of illusions."

The reality for me is in a lot of ways I grew up in a system that told me this was God's way. If we keep ourselves out of the world than we will be God's people and we will be safe from the evil one. The problem with that is the human nature is within all of us we can't keep hardship from happening to ourselves and others. Life show's up and Paul suggests it would be wise for us to be prepared for it. Paul would rather we stand up in the midst. Stand up for others cannot stand up. Stand up so that we can create a world where the kingdom of God dwells. Stand up in truth. Put on the belt of truth in all of life. Face the hard truths and share the beautiful truths of grace and love. Then, put on breastplate of righteousness. Right relationships. Healthy relationships. Good relationships with all those around you and even yourself. Creating a world of acceptance for all even those who are completely different than us is God's dream.

The next piece of armour is one from my experience is needed a lot in today's world. The foot protectors of peace. Do walk into life looking for a fight with yourself, your family member, your co-worker, your neighbour, your church. Trying to work through the legitimate conflicts that are always found between people. If we were to be peacemakers, and work hard for peace and towards peace in all relationships this world, our lives would be completely different. "Then, put on the shield of faith. To trust God. To trust that God is with you, to trust that God is in you, to trust that God will strengthen you for every situation that you are facing. You can't prove it. You can't prove God. You can't prove God's inner strength. You can't prove eternal life. But you have been given the gift of trust. Trusting your inner spiritual self; trusting God's

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slow plan to health and wholeness.”³ You can’t see it, but you trust God’s future plan for your life as you seek the way of wholeness.”

The helmet of salvation for me is resting in the knowledge that if we focus our minds on goodness, love, peace, grace, joy for all the world ultimately we will be saved from being in total despair about the things that cause us to lose hope in the world and in humankind.

“Put on the sword of the Spirit that is the Word of God. There is power in the Bible, in the Word of God. The words of Jesus, the Apostle Paul and the Hebrew Bible are not merely words printed on pages of a dusty book that we pull out when the preacher is coming or when we have an occasional Bible devotional. God’s words are living words, intended to live in us. We learn them, memorize them, recite them, so that God’s words are constantly inside us.”⁴

The final piece of armour in this passage is more of an action than a piece of clothing it is praying in the spirit. Prayer or meditation for me is essential. It is how I start every day - and when ever I start to fall out of that practice I notice my anxiety and my worry increase. It was easier to have this practice before I had young children. Still it might be even more important now that I do. Prayers that my day is blanketed in love and care, peace and joy for myself and others. At the Seattle School of Theology every three hours on the hour a bell chimes. The chime of the bell reminds us to take a moment and focus, pause, acknowledge, breathe. Some people found it interrupted their train of thought - because honestly it could chime when you were in mid sentence. I personally cherished the reminder.

As I was preparing this sermon I read a prayer shared by Rev. Edward Marquart I don’t know its origin but he shared that his mother taught it to him and it was her morning prayer and it is now his. I have decided to place this prayer on my nightstand and I will say it each morning as well. “O God, this morning I come into the stillness of your presence to begin this day with you, so that out of this moment, I may take with me a quiet serenity and strength to last me all day long. I have come to find wisdom, so I do not make any foolish mistakes. I have come to find peace, so that nothing would worry or upset me all through today. I have come to find love so that nothing would make me bitter, unforgiving or unkind. I have come to find justice, so that I would always work for the poor and disadvantaged in the world. I have come to begin this day with you, continue it with you, and end it with you, so that this would be a day which has nothing to regret. Here this morning prayer, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.”⁵ Praying in the Spirit can be healing and restorative.

I do believe that the more we live in this protective spirit of God the more we and others will dwell in God’s kingdom. God’s peace, love and protection are a gift. It will not make our lives perfect and it will not make the world perfect but it will give us a peace that passeth all

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⁴ Adapted IBID

⁵ IBID

understanding, it will give us the opportunity to offer hope and joy in the hopeless, sad, despairing places of the world. May we go in the protective shelter of God's love and hope in this place.