

## At war

23 8 15

Almighty and everlasting God,  
you are always more ready to hear than we to pray  
and to give more than we either desire or deserve:  
pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy,  
forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid  
and giving us those things which we are not worthy to ask  
but through the merits and mediation  
of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

Our text may be found in today's reading from Paul's Epistle to the church at Ephesus chapter 6 and verse 11:

‘ Put on the whole armour of God,  
so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.’

There are different words used in the Bible to describe us as Christians. The notion of service is embodied in the word ‘servant’. Don't you love the phrase of approbation: ‘Well done good and faithful servant’ (25 v21) which we hear in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew's gospel? I love the notion we are ‘stewards’ of all that God has given us to look after for the present – for example, our stewardship in undertaking the renovation of our Alfred Oldknow organ. Then, there is the lovely idea that God is our Father: that we are children of God, his sons and daughters and that Jesus is our brother by adoption. Servants –

**stewards – sons** but today let me focus on a fourth ‘s’ that is implicit in our text today from Ephesians – that we are **soldiers** of Christ.

Well, there is the Salvation Army and the C of E has the Church Army. Several hymns embody this idea: ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’; ‘Soldiers of Christ arise’; ‘Fight the good fight’ to name just three. But what they all suggest is an uncomfortable truth: that we as Christians are engaged in spiritual warfare. No one can doubt the existence of evil. For example, Isis fighters beheading folk because they don’t practice their particular fundamentalist sort of Sunni Islam rooted in the values of the seventh century. For example, the stabbing to death in West Sussex, last month, of a 79 year-old-solicitor by a 34 year-old-man from Woking involved in a minor car accident. Evil exists in so many forms and any one of us could, in theory, embody wickedness by what we think and by what we do and every one of us as Christians is called on to resist evil.

So Paul offers us the image of a Roman soldier as a visual aid. There are six items of equipment; six principles or virtues we need to embrace. Of the equipment, three are defensive, two help us move, one is a weapon.

- **The belt of truth**
- **The breastplate of righteousness**
- **The sandals of the gospel of peace**
- **The shield of faith**
- **The helmet of salvation**
- **The sword of the word of God**

A belt round our waist and sandals on our feet mean we're free to move. Shield, breastplate and helmet all protect us and the sword is our weapon. So let's briefly look at each.

Truth informs us. What we believe is true. We don't live a fantasy or inhabit a dream world nor is what we do part of a fairy tale. The values we embrace reflect what has true, objective worth.

Righteousness is right living. Righteousness is living the good life informed by right values: Jesus sums up righteousness as loving God and loving our neighbour as we love ourselves.

The gospel of peace is one of the fruits of the Spirit. The idea is being centred, being at ease in oneself, calm in the knowledge that we are loved. And the gospel we share with others is the possibility of this inner peace.

Faith is trust. We trust in God. We have faith in God the Father, trust in God the son, confidence in God the Holy Spirit. My old school motto is that of the Worshipful Company of Brewers: 'In God is all our trust'.

Salvation is a gift of God, a grace we freely receive. We don't earn salvation by what we do but what we do is a reflection of our joy and acceptance of the fact we are loved and redeemed through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Lastly, the word of God. God speaking to us. The Word of God informs us, shapes us, makes us the people of the book. And it is by what we know and through what we can mirror to others that we can challenge evil in all its forms.

So Paul urges us to be prepared for the inevitable fight with the forces of evil, however they may manifest themselves, by each one of us putting on the whole armour of God. A Roman soldier with belt and shield, breastplate and helmet, sword in hand and sandals on his feet is a nice image to show us how, like a good boy scout, we should always be prepared.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

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G: Sermons 32 : At war

