

Church at Home

East Leake Methodist Church 2 May 2021

"The Armour of God"

"We will exalt you, our God the King;
We will praise your name for ever and ever.
Every day we will praise you
and extol your name for ever and ever.
Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no-one can fathom."

Psalm 145 vv1-3

**StF 6: Father, we love you,
 we worship and adore you:** 3vv

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPVN3NjbJ_U

Our opening prayers are taken from the Methodist Prayer Handbook for 20/21

Prayer of Adoration

Everything that has breath shout, "Praise the Lord!"
All creatures lift your voice and shout, "Praise the Lord!"
Rise up to the furthest shore and shout, "Praise the Lord!"
Travel to the nearest hill and shout, "Praise the Lord!"
Heaven and earth shall shout, "Praise the Lord!"
And we shall shout
"Praise the Lord!"
Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Mighty Creator, you have made us the pinnacle of your masterpiece to reflect your love, mercy and compassion. We bow our heads in sorrow for we have fallen far short of the potential we have as your children. We have failed to demonstrate your love in our care for each other and the world. We have not reflected your mercy and forgiveness in all our relationships. We have not always worshipped you in spirit and truth.

Thank you that you forgive us, setting us free from sorrow and guilt. Lift us up that we might reflect more clearly your character in the lives we live, for your glory.

Amen

Today we will be thinking of St Paul's call that we put on the armour of God and fight in his army as Christian soldiers. Our readings begin with the Letter to the Ephesians. Our second reading records the story of Jesus receiving a call for help from a Roman officer.

Readings: **Ephesians 6. 10-18**
Luke 7.1-10

Our next hymn praises Jesus as our leader in the fight.

**StF 545: Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art; 5vv**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OhTJZcR1VQ>

Address

My subject today is the Armour of God. In our first reading we heard how the writer of the Letter to the Ephesians urged his readers to prepare for a spiritual struggle by putting on the armour that God provides. There are 6 pieces. I hope that today we will enjoy thinking about all of them, and metaphorically turn ourselves into Christian soldiers.

We all know what a soldier is. When we look at pictures of soldiers today we can see that their weapons have changed – guns instead of swords – and their clothing is now more practical than the shining metal breastplates and the red cloaks that the Roman soldiers wore. But the purpose of soldiers – to defend us against our enemies – is just the same. It is, perhaps, a sad reflection on human nature to say that twenty centuries after Jesus was born, the nations of the world are still training and equipping armies for war.

St Paul's image of a soldier means just as much to us as it did to his first century readers.

What are we Christian soldiers fighting against? St Paul says:

"We are not fighting against human beings but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers of this dark age."
I'm using the translation given by the Good News Bible.

So we are fighting against the forces of evil. This world offers many choices between the good and the bad, the cruel and the kind, and as we go through life we all face decisions about what style of life we are going to adopt.

Our Lord calls us to a very high standard of life. We are not merely to avoid hurting our neighbour, we are actively to love him or her. Rightly, we spend a lot of time in church thinking about how we may achieve that.

Other forces pull us the other way, they pull us down. Bad examples are offered to us as ways of living for us to adopt – for example, stories of greed in families, untruths spoken by politicians in pursuit of a good “soundbite” or crimes committed by people who want to get money and don’t care who they defraud or hurt as long as the perpetrator gets what he or she wants.

So St Paul tells us to “get ready” so that “when the evil day comes, you will be able to resist the enemy’s attacks”. With God’s help, “after fighting to the end, you will still hold your ground”.

We are not alone in this fight. We have each other – the church. God is with us. We “build up our strength in union with the Lord and by means of his mighty power”. We are part of an unseen army of praying Christian people.

Like a good soldier, we are to have our equipment ready, and know how to use it, so that whenever an attack comes we are prepared and ready to fight back.

So what is this equipment?

I had no difficulty in finding a picture of a Roman soldier on the internet. There were lots of pictures. So here is our soldier looking tough and resolute.

Instead of picturing a Roman soldier, you may prefer to think of the equipment of soldiers today, or perhaps of how emergency civilian workers like firefighters or paramedics are equipped.

A plate of armor made of metal strips tied together with leather straps protected the upper body. Although this metal jacket was heavy, the metal strips allowed the soldier some free movement. Soldiers had to help each other put on and lace up their armor.

Under his metal jacket, the soldier wore a tunic of wool.

Soldiers carried metal-tipped throwing spears, short, double-edged swords, and daggers.

This belt, or apron, of leather strips protected the lower body. Heavy weights on the bottom of each strip kept the strips in place.

To improve the grip of his heavy sandals, nails were driven into the underside of the soles and broken into studs.

The soldier's rectangular shield was made of many layers of thick wood wrapped in leather with an iron rim at the top and bottom. The soldier's heavy pack held his personal gear, enough grain for about 15 days, a pick, axe, or saw, cooking utensils, and the stakes needed to build a camp.



So let's turn to the equipment mentioned in our text. The first three items out of the six listed in the Letter would have been put on first.

1. Truth as a **belt** tight round your waist

The belt helps to anchor other items of equipment. If you think of emergency services today, they often have radios and other equipment strapped to a belt so that they can reach them quickly.

For us truth is our belt. It is a fundamental quality that underpins the rest of our conduct. We are truthful people – we do not lie or deceive.

2. Righteousness as a **breastplate**

The breastplate protects us from frontal attacks. If we know that we have behaved well, we have nothing to fear from someone who questions us.

3. As your **shoes**, the readiness to announce the good news of peace.

The Roman legions marched many hundreds of miles in their shoes along all those straight Roman roads. They marched from Rome right up to Northern Scotland.

When we meet people, we come in peace. We have made our peace with God. We have chosen to join His army. We know that we are saved and accepted and loved by Him. So we can be the peacemakers, the ones to defuse an awkward situation or to comfort the distressed.

The remaining three items would have been put on as the enemy came near.

4. Carry faith as a **shield**; for with it you will be able to put out all the burning arrows shot by the Evil One

Looking back at our picture, we can see that the Roman Soldier carried a large and heavy shield. It could be used in lots of ways to protect the body. If the soldiers were attacking a high place, the shield was held above them to deflect missiles thrown from above. If the soldiers were facing an enemy on the battlefield then each man would hold his shield to protect his left side and the right side of his neighbour. Each man partly protected himself and partly protected his neighbour. This technique meant that the enemy saw a wall of shields ahead of them.

What are the "burning arrows" that we face? Lack of confidence, doubts that undermine our faith, depression, anxiety – many of them feelings that may have been aggravated by the restricted life that covid has forced us to lead.

We use faith to strike back. Belief that Jesus died for us: belief that Jesus died for me. The knowledge that God loves us: the knowledge that God loves me. Like the Roman soldiers in a battle, we protect each other through our conversations and meeting together.

5. Accept salvation as a **helmet**

Our Roman soldier wears a sturdy helmet that encircles the front, back and sides of his head.

Just as an army issues equipment to all its soldiers, so God issues us with salvation. It is a precious gift. It is not part of a salary that is received because we have worked for it. It is a gift that is given freely to us, for us to accept.

And finally:

6. Accept the word of God as the **sword** which the Spirit gives you

The sword is used to fight off an attacker. We remember how Our Lord when tempted by the devil in the wilderness used the word of God, sentences of scripture, to refute his enemy's arguments.

We practise our sword fighting skills when we study the word of God at home, when we hear the Bible read in church and when we meet together to discuss it.

As soldiers of Christ we are here to obey and to follow our leader. Our gospel reading gave us an example of a Roman officer who knew all about obeying orders. He didn't need Jesus to visit him personally. He believed that his servant would be cured if Jesus simply said that he was cured.

Best of all, we are not alone in our fight. Christ is our Leader, Christ is our Commanding Officer, Christ is our Enabler.

Let us praise Him as we sing our next hymn

**StF 637: Soldiers of Christ, arise,
and put your armour on**

4vv

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGV7c4U2ICE>

A prayer of commitment

Gracious God, let the light of your face shine upon us; your peace rule in our hearts and your strength be our song. By the gift of your grace let us take up the cross and follow in the steps of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen

We will now pray for other people and for our world.

Dear Lord, we have all been moved by the plight of the people of India, as a new and more devastating wave of covid strikes them. Our country has been in that situation and we can understand how they are suffering. Please help them in their distress. Grant them healing and help them to discover better ways of treating this illness.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We pray also for our own country. Please help us to rebuild our lives and our economy as the tide of the disease ebbs here. Thank you for the discovery of so many vaccines so quickly, which seems like a miracle to us. Thank you for the success of the vaccine programme and for the lives that have been saved. Help us to recover, physically and mentally.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

In our own church, and in other churches we know, we thank you that you have helped us to use so many types of new technology to enable us to worship together. We know that our churches still face many challenges: please guide us as we make decisions about what we should do.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

We bring to you all those we know in distress of mind or body. We ask for your healing of them. In the silence we lift up to you their names.....

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

We bring together all our prayers and offer them to you, in the mighty name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen

The Lord's Prayer
Our Father ...

Our last hymn is a call to action

**Hymns and Psalms 718: Onward, Christian soldiers,
 Marching as to war,
 With the cross of Jesus
 Going on before!**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrXcc-m4XX8>

Closing Prayers

Lord of heaven and earth,
all creation resounds with your praise.
As we rejoice in your presence
may we know your power to save.
Now and for ever,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

We finish our service by sharing in the Grace

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen