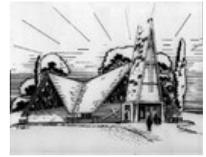




Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon- 15th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 17B)

Wrestling with the cosmic powers!



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Eph 6, 10-20:

• CPH Commentary translation 10 Finally, be strengthened in the Lord, that is, in his mighty strength. 11 Let yourselves be clothed with the full armour of God so that you may be able to stand against the devil's schemes.

• 12 For our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

• 13 For this reason take up the full armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and so, having accomplished all things, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having belted your waist with truth, and having clothed yourselves with the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, 16 among all these things having taken up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one; 17 and receive the helmet of salvation, and the short sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

• Let us pray: *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Inspire us to put on the armour you provide and be with us as we struggle in our daily lives with the cosmic powers. Make us steadfast so that we will not move from Your pure Word of Law and Grace! Amen.*

• Dear beloved of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

• The enemy you don't see is more dangerous than the one you do see. The enemy you don't see can attack you from a side which you don't expect. Now, when it comes to the battle of the mind and our spirit, if you don't know about your enemy, he might influence you and you would not even realise it.

• It was a fatal movement by a part of Christianity to deny the existence of satan and his angels. It was an attempt with a seemingly good missionary reason behind it- to reach those who subscribe to a materialism only world-view. For such

people the diabolos, satan could not exist. So, the teachings of the Bible were reinterpreted without taking into account the evil foe and of course trying to exclude as far as possible all miracles of God

- Against this clear distortion of the Word of God, the charismatic movement arose to emphasise the miracles of God and they were almost focusing on how the Christians should and could overcome the devil in their own lives. Extensive teachings of spiritual warfare, going so far as to try and tap into pagan spiritual teachings to find out how the devil ticks and building a whole strategy of warfare upon such dubious sources.
- The truth is, whoever denies that satan and all his evil angels exist, after hearing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the one above all who fully exposed them, cannot confess: Jesus is LORD!
- Dear congregation, there might be doubts in our hearts, but those doubts stem from our old Adam who subscribes to seeing is believing. The Apostle Paul, fully in line with Jesus, our Lord, beyond any doubt, clearly states, who our real enemies are [6,12]: *“For our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”*
- This is not to be understood mythologically. It’s not a myth. These are real powers. Now, satan and his demons use human beings under their influence, to do their dirty work. Those are the false teachers who fall for the devil’s schemes and proclaim them as “gospel”.
- False teachings are deceitful. What does this mean? They sound like the real thing, but they are not. And we as baptised believers in Christ come under attack by such fake teachings. It doesn’t work to try and simply not hear these and not wonder what is being spewed forth. We hear and they normally suite our old Adam quite well. That is the trouble.
- Such a teaching is the modern sounding idea that the spiritual world does not exist, including evil in person. What we cannot see or measure is not. So, don’t worry about the spiritual forces of evil. It all comes down to you, what you can do, what we as humankind can do to save the planet and be better people. That is when political and social programs become central, even in the church.
- On the other hand we have the prevailing teaching, which says, no, the previous teaching is false. Evil in person exists and we have to take evil on, actively attack satan, with the help of God of course, but we have to do it and therefore we have to actively use spiritual weapons. We have to be clever and find out how evil

works and work out our own strategies how to conquer evil, always with the help of God of course.

• Paul follows neither of these directions! There is more truth in the last position, namely evil angels do indeed exist, than in the first position. But there is a crucial problem even with the second position which should be exposed as we take another close look at what Paul has to say.

• The issue shows itself in the first verse already, “*be strengthened in the Lord*”- that verb is in the passive mode. It sets the tone and direction of the whole passage. The main actor is God, not us! And yet, we must come to Him, to be strengthened! We have no strength on our own. We need to remain connected to Christ and constantly be strengthened! After being baptised, we cannot go on our own and take satan on! In fact baptism opens our eyes that we begin to realise, I am very weak, but Christ is strong. So, I better abide in Him all the time.

• Then Paul continues,[11] “*Let yourselves be clothed with the full armour of God so that you may be able to stand against the devil’s schemes.*” Again the passive, let yourselves be clothed. Jesus has to clothe us with the full armour belonging to God. And in Isaiah 59 we heard this morning that this is the armour God put on Himself. He gives us His armour. He gives us His own armour so that we may do what ... to attack satan ferociously and try and destroy him completely?? No. To stand against the evil schemes, to stand against the evil teachings, to not fall for deception. To stand means to be steadfast in the Truth. To abide in the pure and true confession of Christ’s teaching!

• We are not attacking. We are being attacked. But God clothes us with His armour, with the gifts He gives to us in Baptism, through the Spirit, truth, the righteousness of Christ, peace with God, faith in Jesus’ death on the cross, and the gift of salvation- being saved from all evil. Let us not be found without these. Come to Christ regularly to be clothed with His armour, to be ready for the day of the attack.

• Its all available in the Body of Christ. In Baptism God has clothed you with Christ and everything that comes along with Him. Remain clothed in Him, grow into Him to become more steadfast. Hear, learn and inwardly digest His Word regularly.

• God gives us the love for the truth, the pure truth, namely that He has fought for us and won on Golgotha. The main battle has been won by God against all evil. Listen to the end of the opening statement of this letter: “*I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in*

the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

- *And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*
- Victory is done! It is fulfilled. We are living in the time of the aftermath of the main battle. We can draw on the gifts of God given to us through His means of Grace, to remain steadfast against all attacks, fully knowing, its not my strength, not my armour. I depend on Jesus alone.
- And then there is the sword, often said to be the active weapon in God's arsenal. But the Greek word refers to the small sword which the soldiers used mainly for self defence. It does not refer to the long sword which was used for all out attack. Interestingly enough the sword God uses is the long sword to attack all out. On the Last Day Christ will finally destroy satan completely with the long sword coming out of His mouth, with His Word. But, we also get the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit to drive away satan. This refers to the Word of the Cross which exposes the evilness of our old Adam and at the same time reveals the steadfast Grace of God towards the poor in the Spirit.
- This empowers us to stand against the evil one and all his schemes and it drives us closer and closer to Jesus, who is far above all evil. So, God wants us to watchful, not afraid, of the evil one. He spells grave danger to us, but only if we think he does not even exist and if we think too high of ourselves and think that we can have a go at him, as if we have to be the heroes of our age. That would be playing right into the hands of the evil foe.
- God empowers us to stand steadfastly on His true doctrine, on the right confession spelled out for us, very clearly, by the Apostles of Christ.
- Let us pray: God, please clothe us with Your armour so that we will not move even an inch from Your pure Law and Gospel and increase in us the desire to know Your Word much better so that we will stand in the evil day. **Amen.**
- Glory be to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.
- *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. **Amen.** [NKJ 2 Cor3:14.]*