

PENTECOST 14 YEAR B
JOSHUA 24:1-2a, 14-18
EPHESIANS 6:10-20
JOHN 6:56-69
AUGUST 25, 26, 2018

These past weeks we talked about Jesus being the bread of life. Jesus says that if we eat and drink we will have life. Today in John 6 we heard that many followers were falling away but that the 12 are remaining. Peter makes his declaration about remaining with Jesus. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Ephesians tells about the unity of the body of Christ. We heard a couple of weeks ago that Jews and Gentiles are one body with Christ as the head. We are one with a common mission bound by the gospel of Jesus Christ. As one body of Christ we work for justice and peace. We are to be strong in the Lord and strong in the word of God. Paul also told about not making room for the devil in our anger and in our life decisions. We are to remain faithful in the truth.

The other day four of us went to Cedar Falls to learn about the Alpha course and to learn how to run and lead the course. Ardy Erickson, Dorothy Powers and Marsha Adix went with me so that we might understand how to lead this course. Our focus was on the gospel of Jesus Christ and how the Holy Spirit is working through the church to energize Christians and to minister to those that are not part of the church but are drawn to this course. It was an interesting afternoon and evening gathering with others to learn. There was lots of information given in a short time. In some ways it was intimidating and overwhelming. One of the leaders referred to this information as a water hose running wild. As we listened to those leading our session on Wednesday it was tempting to believe it was too much for us to bite off. It was too large for us to get our minds around. Satan would have us give up the idea of reaching out to our people and our community in this way. Satan tells us to try something less involved.

Ephesians 6:10, 11 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Ephesians 6 speaks of the church taking up the whole armor of God. The church receives its power from God through the cross of Jesus Christ. The church lives and fights beside the Lord. Paul writes that the battle takes place at the cosmic level. In recent times we heard about gunshots fired in our city, tornados tearing through communities and people being kidnapped, abducted and sometimes killed. Paul would say we are not fighting against flesh and blood but against the wiles of the devil.

These are real battles being fought on earth. All of the tragedies faced in recent weeks and months are very real. They are things we deal with on a physical level as we mourn our dead, dig out from the storms and worry about our community. It is also on a spiritual level. These challenges and struggles cause us to wonder about faith and about where God is. Paul speaks of these things as a war we all must fight against Satan and the powers of evil and darkness. By taking up God's armor the community of faith becomes active in the struggle against spiritual forces. In these opening verses of our text Paul says we are to clothe ourselves with the Armor of God. We are to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. As the church of Jesus Christ we take an active role in this war against Satan and evil in the world. We are active in fighting for justice and peace but also by standing with someone that faces the challenges of life.

Most of us know what it is to struggle against Satan and the evil around us. It could be that you cannot place your finger on the evil around you because you may not have thought of it as something other than the everyday struggles in your life. Throughout his letters Paul speaks of sin is a power rather than a type of human action. Of course the power of sin is made evident in the things

we say and do. In this reading from Ephesians 6 Paul continues to allow his thoughts to unfold.

Ephesians 6:12 our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness.

As Christians we are called to persevere. We continue to fight against Satan and evil throughout our lives. There are those days we are tempted to give in to the sin and evil around us. We might see the fight as being too difficult or that it is only a matter of time before we will fall into sin. When we are tempted to give in and give up we are reminded that God walks with us to give us strength. Old Testament prophets used the similar words as they spoke about how God would defend against injustice and evil.

Isaiah 59:15-17 Truth is lacking, and whoever turns from evil is despoiled. The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.¹⁶He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him. ¹⁷He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle.

In Ephesians, God's own armor is for all that believe in God's power to save. We have God's own protection as we stand against the "powers of this present darkness". The pieces of the armor are all ways that we are defended from the power of Satan and this present darkness. In verse 17 Paul speaks of the one weapon that puts us on the offensive. The sword of the Spirit is the word of God. Our salvation comes from God given freely through faith. Being right with God and continuing in the word of God gives ability to "quench the flaming arrows of the evil one." In John 6, Peter declared that Jesus has the words of eternal life. This is the word of truth and comes by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Even though Peter and the others often missed the point they knew the truth of God and that Jesus is the Christ. God's word was the weapon with which to fight Satan and powers of this world.

Ephesians 6:18 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.

Prayer is one of the ways we stay connected to God and to each other. Through prayer we are able to pick up the armor of God. Paul prays for the church that we would have strength and understanding. The churches in Ephesus and in other places were taught to pray for all of the saints and for the Paul as well. Our congregation has taken this challenge and this teaching seriously as we pray for the preacher before the sermon. The sermon is one of those times the powers of evil and Satan seeks to do damage. If the preacher can be distracted while preaching the message from God's word that message becomes less effective. When the people are distracted they cannot hear clearly the word of God as the Holy Spirit intends.

The church's struggle is a heavenly one against spiritual powers. Paul is in the chains of imprisonment. He was physically chained to a Roman guard but there is also spiritual warfare. Satan seeks any means to destroy the message of God. Satan cannot destroy the word of God but can seek to remove the messenger. In our present time God's messengers are threatened in many ways but the word of God cannot be silenced. The armor of God does not mean that the church and Christians will not encounter difficulties. There will always be those that feel threatened by the truth from God's word. The armor of God enables Christians to persevere through all difficulties. Through perseverance and prayer, the church may boldly proclaim the gospel even in the midst of persecution and hardship. AMEN