

Rev. Laura Blazek - August 23rd, 2015

Ephesians 6, 10-20

The reading from Ephesians is one that is always fun to teach to children. The whole ‘armor of God’ thing is something they can relate to, particularly if you teach it around the time of the Medieval Fair. While concepts like righteousness, faith, and salvation may be difficult for them to grasp, helmets, shields, and swords they understand fairly well. So, it is with some excitement that they willingly take pieces of poster board emblazoned with the word “righteousness” and tie them onto their body with pieces of yarn. They may look at you a little funny when you hand them a trimmed-up milk jug with the word “salvation” scrawled across it, but they plop it onto their heads none the less. And when you pull out the cardboard shields of “faith” followed by the empty gift-wrap-tube-swords of the “Word of God”, they take them up proudly proclaiming themselves to be part of God’s army.

They leave the Sunday school room with wide smiles and a fire alight in their eyes brandishing their gift-wrap-tube swords with glee. You can probably guess what happens next. They begin whacking each other over the head with them. Over the din of the card board battle you hear someone yell, “I will smite thee with the Word of God!”, and then the battle begins in earnest.

That reminds me of what will happen when Christians around the country walk out the doors of their church on Sunday morning. As we walk out those doors we tend to become self-righteous, believing that we are right and they are wrong. Further, we can prove it, as we whip out Bible passage after Bible passage to support our position. We bandy about words like “Christian values” and “Godly rights” using them as a sword to subjugate and conquer as we try to carve out a place for ‘me, myself, and I’ in the world.

And in an election year, these terms are tossed about more than ever. These terms are used as justification for the way we treat people who aren’t members of our “club”- those who look different than us, those who are from another country, those of a different economic status, or those of a different religious tradition. Which begs the question, when we walk out those doors do we don the armor of God or the armor of Man?

The armor of Man is like the armor that those Sunday school kids put on. It is of our own creation and the words emblazoned on it are our words, not God’s. Frederick Buechner (pronounced BEEK-ner) describes the armor of man like this: “Gird your loins with wisdom, the sad wisdom of the world which knows that dog eats dog, that the gods help those who help themselves and charity begins at home. Put on the breastplate of self-confidence because if you have no faith in yourself, if you cannot trust to your own wits, then you will never get anywhere.

Let your feet be shod with the gospel of success-the good news that you can get just about anything in this world if you want it badly enough and are willing to fight for it. Above all, take the shield of security because in a perilous world where anything can happen, security is perhaps what you need more than anything else - the security of money in the bank, or a college degree, or some basic skill that you can always fall back on. And take the helmet of attractiveness or personality and the sword of wit.”

Does that description sound uncomfortably familiar? When we don the armor of Man, we are joining in a battle against other human beings. Our adversaries are made of flesh and blood and the choices we make to get ahead in this world means that someone is left behind to go hungry, to live without adequate water, to live in poverty, to die of disease, malnutrition or the horror of war.

If you have trouble picturing what this is like, then read “The Hunger Games” trilogy. It is about much more than a bow and arrow wielding teenage girl; it is about how we treat people. Do we treat people as people or do we treat them as a commodity? When we don the armor of Man we treat people as a commodity.

Christ calls us to see people not as a commodity but as a fellow child of God, to treat people as we would treat Christ himself. If Christ came to you saying he had no food for the table, would you send Him away hungry? If Christ told you He couldn’t afford a place to sleep, would you tell Him, “Tough luck. Get a job.” And then send Him back out into streets? If Christ came to you telling you He was sick and needed medical attention would you demand two forms of ID and proof of insurance before tending to His needs?

Yet, this is the world in which we live. It is a world where children and adults die of hunger. And before you dismiss this as a third world problem, people are dying of hunger here in the United States where we pride ourselves on being one of the most advanced and richest nations in the world. Here in Norman, Food and Shelter for Friends serves approximately 250 meals a day to those who otherwise would go hungry. I could toss out many other statistics on hunger, and I guarantee you that after the sermon, someone would come to me and toss out a statistic of their own to prove the hunger crisis isn’t as bad as I claim, but that won’t change the reality that hunger kills. Hunger kills because malnutrition leads to inability to fight disease, causes inattentiveness, decreases the ability to learn so the cycle of poverty continues, results in premature aging and so much more. Hunger kills our children. Hunger kills our senior citizens who have worked a lifetime to get ahead. Hunger kills our veterans. Hunger kills mothers and fathers.

In a world where it has been proven time and again that there is enough food for everyone, hunger will continue to kill unless...as that great theologian Dr. Seuss tells us in the “The Lorax”... “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.”

That is the struggle that Paul is calling us to join. The struggle isn't against each other but against those who would have us believe that it is “us” against “them”. The armor that Paul calls us to don is armor that completes us and makes us whole. It is an armor that helps us realize that we don't really need armor at all but we do need the ability to forgive. We need the ability to see beyond ourselves and our own needs to the needs of others so that we can all live in peace and harmony in this world God has created. We need the ability to trust in Christ's message of love and redemption that brings us eternal life. We need the ability at the end of the day to say to ourselves that we lived the life that Christ calls us to live.

And that isn't easy. It isn't any cakewalk, and it is rarely immediately gratifying. It takes hard work and a commitment to see beyond ourselves for the good of all. Donning the armor of God means that we must stand up and say to our leaders and those in authority, “enough.” Donning the armor of God means fighting for change so that everyone has enough food to eat, so that everyone has clean water to drink, so that we will live in a world where there is truly justice, freedom and peace for all.

I will leave you with the words of the wise Lorax, “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.”

Amen.