

30<sup>th</sup> August, A.D. 2009  
13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Ephesians 6: 10-20  
The Rev. Thomas W. Allen

**Prayer: May we ever be thankful to the power of Almighty God, who has granted unto us his mercy, pardoned us in grace, and continues to sustain us with his mighty word. In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.”**

**Paul says, “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the powers, against**

**the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”**

**Be strong in the Lord and put on the whole armor of God. Nice, compelling words from Paul, right? Be strong. Put on the armor. Stand firm. Our struggle is against the schemes of the devil. The dark one. Well, how do we do this? How do we here, in the year 2009, do this?**

**I think this message relates to us, now, as much as it did when Paul first said those words.**

**Anyone who keeps up with ECUSA news knows this. Or even if you don't keep up with the latest news**

**concerning our national church, you probably get an ear full every now and then anyway because our church seems to call attention to itself—whether it's in the New York Times or on a cable network news station. All churches have issues and divisions, but lately, the Episcopal Church is the poster child for divisions. And because of this, it's easy to become distracted. Distracted from the main thing that the church is charged to do: preach and live the gospel in areas of our lives.**

**But there is good news in all this. And the news is that the same armor that was available to the church of Ephesus is available to**

**the Episcopal Church, and the Church of the Holy Cross, Stateburg. What is this armor?**

**We all know what armor is. Some of our favorite movies depict characters wearing it: *The Lord of the Rings, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, or the infamous Maximus in the *Gladiator* may come to mind. Armor serves one main purpose: to defend. To defend the body from harm. So when Paul uses this wonderful analogy, put on the full armor of God, it is comforting. We have an armor to defend us wherever we may find ourselves. A spiritual armor. Let's take a look.**

**In Ephesians 6:10-20 we are given the details of this armor. It includes the belt of truth buckled around your waist. The breastplate of righteousness in place. Feet fitted with readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. A shield of faith to extinguish all the arrows of the evil one. A helmet of salvation. And the sword of the spirit—which is the word of God. Be alert! Paul says. Stand and walk in full armor.**

**We are living in very challenging times. Personally, I believe all times are challenging but there are degrees as history unfolds. Certainly we're not as challenged as the uncertainty of the American Revolution. However, we do live in**

**a time which is very demanding. Every generation tends to look at the present generation and shake their heads. I can't believe this or that is happening. Or not happening. Or, "I never thought I'd see the day that...." you fill in the blank! When we as a people look generational at the landscape of our culture, community, and even our church, it always seems to be different. I mean, who would ever thought people would use texting devices while driving and have accidents that harm and kill people? Who would have ever thought that you could play a virtual game with someone across the world, while remaining in your own home, who doesn't even speak**

**the same language? Or perhaps closer to home, who would've thought the church would deny the essential doctrines of the faith?**

**Paul says that we are to be strong in the Lord. For “we” are not contenting against flesh and blood...**

**This “we”, points to all of us. Paul is appealing to us as individuals here, no doubt about it. We do have an individual responsibility to grow in our faith. To exercise that gift of grace which has been freely given to us--to commune with our God to build up and strengthen our knowledge of his goodness and holiness. In fact, we must grow in our faith. We have no choice or we**

**will be sifted like chaff, blown from one end of Sumter County to the other. No direction, no real purpose of what we're to be in Christ if we don't stand up, dedicate ourselves to the life and work of this parish so we can, as Paul says, for all the saints now: "to that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints."**

**Paul warns us of that great spiritual darkness which influences every aspect of our society, institutions, and church. Jesus has warned us in the gospel lesson this morning: We must rid ourselves of idolatry, greed, self-loathing, and in particular our spiritual apathy. For these principalities and world**

**rulers which we battle against ultimately spring forth from the heart. It's not what's on the outside that defiles a man--it is what is implanted on the inside. It is from within that we create the chaos which makes us shake our heads at the generation which lives today. Those building blocks aren't in place. The deck of cards that have been neatly stacked generation after generation are beginning to crumble. Those that write about this call it: post-modernism. I call it culture fragmentation and alienation. We're fragmented because the center or the core of who we are as a church is no more. Our doctrine has been replaced with something ugly, in fact,**

**something terrifying. No longer is sin to be despised. So sad. It's so sad it has produced alienation. We're estranged from one another whether in the church or in the culture. The anxiety produced from this is catastrophic.**

**When the church forgets how to recognize truth from error, the full armor is needed. This is not the time for apathy. This is not the time to collapse into a state of "who cares?"**

**Paul says to the church--keep alert! Keep alert with all perseverance. Look, I'm so thankful that that old place next door is being restored. It is going to be a beautiful place. But**

**is it only going to be a beautiful, historic place, a museum? Or is it going to be a place where the armor of God enters those doors and stands firm and proclaims the truth of the Gospel, that precious, truth entrusted to the Church? You see, it is not just the priest's responsibility to wear the armor. It is yours. It is the responsibility of all believers. We received an incredible gift to rebuild the outer and inner church—the building next door—and with that gift comes a calling to proclaim the truths of our faith with boldness. To consider the future souls who will walk through those doors. We are to build ourselves up in the Lord so that we may do battle against the circling**

**wagons of apostasy. Or of apathy. Apathy will kill a church quicker than mere church politics. Sometimes we recognize it and even tried to “fix it” by tinkering with our outer life. Trying the latest spiritual fad, the latest packaged program, even another church altogether—with the good intention of “fixing” our apathy or discontent. Perhaps instead of addressing the root and only treating the symptom, we find ourselves weary, jaded, or bored. The new thing didn’t work. We’re still stuck with ourselves! We realize that the problem is often our own disconnect with the Lord, not our disconnect with others or the church. We’re the problem. We’ve**

**dismantled our armor. Perhaps we've stopped praying, or we've stopped worshipping, or we've stopped loving Christ above all else.**

**When Paul writes this letter to the church, to warn and encourage them to put on the full armor, he himself is bound in chains. We're not literally in chains. The only chain we have is our own spiritual apathy. When we give up. When we say Holy Cross can't be this or that. Or, what's the point? Holy Cross will never be as active as this or that church over there. Or Holy Cross is just a beautiful building. I categorically reject this notion. We may not ever be a 400 member congregation. I could care less**

**about our numbers—but our real strength will be in how we do battle. How we maintain substance over apathy. How we arise and walk through the doors, and through our own lives with a full armor: with the belt of truth buckled around our waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, with our shields of faith, with our helmets of salvation and with the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God. That is how we lay the foundation of this church family. That’s how we’ll grow.**

**And then, we shall declare the truth of faith with boldness. With beautiful and reverent and sincere worship. God deserves no less. We**

**should boldly declare Holy Cross is a place where broken people who are rich or poor can come and worship God in the beauty of holiness. That our worship and proclamation of the Word, the sword of the Spirit, is not to be taken lightly. That the beauty of a place is only as bright as the reflection of our armor. A place that not only cares about restoring our building but we care about restoring marriages, strengthening marriages, caring for the single person, the old, and the young. Loving families and people from all walks of life. The people our Lord ministered to. We do this by taking our faith seriously. Seriously enough to catch the joy of doing**

**battle against the principalities which seek to destroy us and to enslave us. May we be a parish that continues to lay, build, and protect our spiritual foundation. May we put on the full armor of God, today, and each day to come.**

**And as our collect for the week reminds us: Lord of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and bring forth in us the fruit of good works...” May our fruit increase. Amen.**

