

***The Armour of God***  
**Ephesians 6: 10-20**  
**St. Paul's, Milford**  
**Sunday 23 August 2015: 8:00 and 9:30**

If I were to preach a sermon about truth and righteousness, salvation and truth, faith and the word of God, topped off with prayer, I think you would probably doze off. But I know you are very polite people (most Anglicans are), so your yawns would be stifled. You might, however, shuffle around a bit until you found a more comfortable posture.

I think Paul had a similar concern. He was itching to say something or at least to write it down. The problem was that he was in prison. No laptop, no iPad, no recently downloaded Windows 10. Worse still he was handcuffed - or rather chained to - a Roman soldier. So that he couldn't escape. No electronic bracelets in those days; no probation service either. He was chained by the wrist, night and day. Later on Paul describes himself as 'an ambassador in chains'. Although tied up he still wanted to share the good news about Jesus, the one who had changed his life.

But Paul was an imaginative person. He had time on his hands. We can be sure that he often talked to the soldiers who were guarding him. We can be sure that the soldiers were bored out of their tree being tied up to this man. When people are bored they can do very strange things. I can remember being at church as a young person and doing two things. One was to look through the old prayer book and in particular at what was called 'The Table of Kindred and Affinity', basically a list of the sort of people to whom you were not allowed to be married! It's great reading. You were not allowed to be married to 30 different groups of people, for example, your daughter's son's wife or even your wife's sister and certainly not your step-mother. I often thought that I wouldn't want to marry any of those listed. The other thing I did to avert chronic boredom was to add up the hymn numbers on the board. You would be amazed at how often they added up to an exact 100!

It may not have been in such circumstances that Paul exercised his mind. But he was a creative thinker and one day it dawned on him, the penny dropped, that the uniform the soldier wore was actually a jolly good reminder of what a follower of Jesus had to be like. There right next to him was this soldier in uniform, a suit of armour, the ancient equivalent of the Armed Offenders

Squad. Each piece of the armour reminded Paul of the sort of armour a Christian should wear.

First, there was the **belt** worn around the middle, around the tunic. His sword hung from it. It meant he had freedom of movement. And so it was with the Christian: the ability to move freely and quickly because he knows the truth and so Paul referred to this as **the belt of truth**.

The next thing Paul noticed was the **breastplate**. Today's equivalent is the flap jacket. It was very important as it protected the soldier from injury. Paul described it as the **breastplate of righteousness**. Words are not enough to protect us, but a good life is. The only way to meet the accusation against Christianity is to show how good a Christian can be. Remember the words from *My Fair Lady*; Eliza says to Freddie: "Don't talk of love, show me!"

Then the **sandals**. The sign of being equipped and ready to move. The follower of Christ, eager to be at the ready to share the good news with others, especially to those who have not heard it. The sandals; **the shoes of readiness**. That always reminds me of the Melanesian Brothers in many parts of the South Pacific, young men of the Anglican Church who take vows for say three years. They live in households of four, build their own house and grow their own food. They wear a simple black uniform – shorts and T-shirt with a cross and sandals. They walk everywhere and so sandals are important. All that they need they carry on their shoulders and they walk with their stick.

Paul also noticed the **shield**. Not just a nice piece of heraldry, nicely painted red and white, for example. This was more sinister. It was a great oblong shield made of two pieces of wood glued together. One of the most dangerous weapons in ancient warfare was the fiery dart; tipped with tow, dipped in pitch and set alight and then thrown. The great oblong shield was designed not only to stop the dart but also to quench the fire, to put out the flames. The shield acted as a defence. In the same way faith deals with the darts of temptation. When we walk close with Christ we are safe from temptation. The shield then is the **shield of faith**.

Then there was the **helmet**. The helmet to protect the vulnerable head with which we see, think, hear and speak. Paul refers to **the helmet of salvation**. Salvation, not something that looks back; not something that means only forgiveness for past sins, but in fact means the strength to deal with all future attacks of sin. Forgiveness for the past, but strength also for the future.

The **sword**, the weapon of defence but also of attack. Oliver Cromwell, not one of my personal heroes but a significant person for all that, is said to have fought with a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other. The sword then is our weapon of defence and of attack. We can never defeat God's enemies without the words, the message and the strength in God's book. **The sword of the Spirit**; the word of God.

The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of readiness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit; these are all part of the armour of God – to defend and to attack with.

But Paul doesn't stop there. He comes to the greatest weapon of all: prayer. Keep praying in the spirit at every crisis with every kind of prayer.

Three things he says:

**Prayer must be constant.** Not only when there's a crisis, but day by day.

**Prayer must be intense.** It demands concentration. As he says, it must be sleepless and persevering. We need to make time to pray. The great religious communities have set times of prayer throughout the day, on 7 or 8 occasions. The Book of Common Prayer gave Anglicans the opportunity to pray twice a day. The NZPB provides opportunity for prayer using a number of different schemes.

**Prayer must be unselfish.** Not only for ourselves, but for all God's people. We must pray as much for others and with others as for ourselves.

Then, finally, Paul asks others for their prayers. Pray also for me, he asks. Not for my comfort, not for my peace, but "that I might be allowed to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel".

No Christian leaders, clergy or lay, can go on unless their people are upholding them in prayer. And that's as true for this parish as it is for any other. Do pray for your clergy as they pray for you. Amen.