

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
The seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 15, 2024
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft

O Church, Arise

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place, ¹⁵and with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals. ¹⁶At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. ¹⁷Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Prayer Requests ¹⁸At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints. – Ephesians 6:10-18 EHV

Swords clashed in a storm of steel. Men's shouts echoed across the battlefield. Hooves thundered with horses they rode. Flaming arrows poured down from above. Smoke filled the air. Although it appears to be an intense battle, there was a certain aura in the air that gave the indication that this battle had already been won. The battle was tough, but the soldiers fought in a war that had already been won.

Now, we study a well-known section of the Bible that invokes images of an ancient battle. The imagery of the spiritual battle with the forces of evil. We are the church amidst the spiritual battles of this life. Today, we are called to arms. **O Church, Arise.**

Earlier, we sang a beautiful newer Christian hymn that uses the imagery of this call to arms. This hymn titled, "O Church, Arise" has two lines that I will use to divide this text. The church is called to rage against the captor. The church is also called to arise for now the weak can say that they are strong. These lines from this hymn will serve as the outline of our meditation as we too receive the call to arms.

O Church, Arise to rage against the captor. This is the call to arms that Paul had for the Ephesians. Let's break down what Paul has written here.

"Be strong in the Lord." This is a reminder for the Ephesians as to where the power comes from. It is God who empowers them to fight.

"Stand against the schemes of the Devil." Paul reminded the Ephesians that they had a clear enemy. The devil was scheming against them. He had sophisticated plans as to how he would try to take them down.

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood" With this statement, Paul reminded the Ephesians that the battle is spiritual. The devil and the demons were waging war against the Christians. Sometimes, believers can be short sighted in only thinking about the physical problems that they face. Paul redirected them to remember these spiritual enemies.

Paul's call for the Ephesians was to be ready. Their enemy the devil and his demonic forces, although unseen, were there. They were striving to take them down. Therefore, Paul encouraged them, **O Church Arise** to rage against the captor.

In warfare, a soldier must always be on alert of potential attacks that may come his way. Whether it is tactical or guerrilla warfare, there is always the potential of an ambush. An ambush is an attack in which

the attackers hid themselves prior to the fight. They would do this to catch the soldiers off guard and exploit the element of surprise.

When it comes to spiritual warfare, it may feel as though we are being ambushed because our enemies are unseen. Therefore, the call that Paul had for the Ephesians to be strong in the Lord and arise ready for battle is a constant call. The attacks from the demonic forces could come at any time and from any place.

What do these attacks look like? Well, first we can see Biblical examples of demon-possession which we saw in the gospel. Although not specific to believers, this is an attack that the evil spiritual forces may assail still today.

Note that the devil is a schemer. He looks to what works well in his attacks. In our society, it seems as though overt attacks like demon-possession is not the plan that he uses to attack. In our society, he seems to use other plans.

Consider the well-known account of how Satan attacked Job. Satan used physical ailments, the death of loved ones, and even the unhelpful words of others as his attacks on Job. This is similar to how the evil spiritual forces will attack you. They will use the pressure of sinful society. They will use the doubts that creep into your head. They will use interpersonal struggles. They may even use good gifts that God has given. They will use schemes and tactics to try to get you to "*Curse God and die!*" (Job 2:9b EHV)

Do you recognize the devil's attacks? Do you understand that there are evil spiritual forces who wage war against you? Or have you been tricked into thinking that what you cannot see is not there? God has called you to "*stand firm against the devil's schemes.*" If you fail to listen to God's instructions in this way, you are falling into the devil's schemes.

These evil spiritual forces may trick you into ignoring them. This will make you susceptible to them. Their scheme may be to lead you to doubt God or sin against him. Worst yet, their scheme may be to accuse you and get you to doubt God's forgiveness. Do not make yourself susceptible to these attacks. Failing to stand against the devil's schemes because we are unaware of them is a dangerous sin. These evil spiritual forces want to drag you to hell where they are being tortured for eternity. If you ignore them and fail to stand against their attacks, they will bring you down.

We, as the church, are called to stand. **O Church, Arise to rage against the captor.** When you fail to stand firm, it is indeed sinful, but our confidence in this battle comes from the fact that Jesus stood firm for you. During Jesus' life on earth, he faced every attack from these evil spiritual forces and overcame them. Jesus "*has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.*" (Hebrews 4:15 EHV) As your substitute, Jesus stood up against the devil's schemes. In his death, he defeated Satan, "*he also shared the same flesh and blood, so that through death he could destroy the one who had the power of death (that is, the Devil).*" (Hebrews 2:14 EHV)

In the hymn we sang today, we talked about hearing our captain's call. Jesus is our captain, and he defeated our enemy. Therefore, we can be strong in the Lord. In baptism, you were connected to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Through the Word and Sacrament, you are continually strengthened **to rage against the captor.** Therefore, listen to the call, **O Church, Arise.**

Already in this message, I have alluded to the fact that the strength to stand comes from the Lord. In the second part of this sermon, we continue to see this as we consider the call, **O Church, Arise for now the weak can say that they are strong.**

Humanity is too weak to stand against the devil's schemes on their own. This is why Paul directed the Ephesians to the power of God as he protects them with his full armor. Paul broke down what the full

armor of God consisted of. It is possible that the order Paul shared the components was in line with how a Roman soldier would have dressed for battle. What are the components that make the soldier in the spiritual battle ready? There is truth, righteousness, readiness from the gospel, faith, salvation, and the word of God. This armor is the armor that God had given to believers to protect them from the spiritual attacks of these evil forces. With it, God gave them one weapon. The weapon was the word of God.

The final encouragement for the Ephesians from Paul was to go to God in prayer. God tells his people that their prayer is powerful. In this spiritual battle with the evil forces, Christians need to pray consistently. They cannot go it alone.

Again, humanity is too weak on its own to fight against the devil and the demons. Yet, God equips them for battle. Paul directed the Ephesians to see that God protects them with his Word and they were invited to go to God repeatedly in prayer. This is for the weak had been made strong. Paul called to them, **O Church, Arise**.

In times of war, it would be foolish for a soldier to go out without the proper protection. In modern day battles, the armor is made up of ballistic vests, body armor, helmets, and communication and tracking technologies. In medieval times, a knight's armor was made up of plate armor and helmets. No matter the time and style, soldiers knew they needed armor to protect them in battle. Even more so, it would be foolish to enter this spiritual battle without the full armor of God. We cannot do it on our own. But in Christ, we can say that we are strong.

Previously I asked if you acknowledge the attacks of these evil forces that come our way. Now, we must ask if you come properly prepared in the face of these attacks. We already know that the fight is coming our way. Are we ever tempted to try to fight on our own or with no protection?

What does it look like to fight without protection? This would be living a life that is disconnected from God. In this section about the full armor of God we see that a total reliance on God is a necessity. Therefore, we bring every petition, fear, and battle to him in prayer. We go to his Word constantly because that is how we are dressed in this armor.

An inconsistent life of prayer and devotion is the equivalent of failing to wear your armor. Do you pray to God about spiritual needs daily? Do you read the Bible every single day? If your answer to these questions is no, you are putting yourself in danger of these attacks. Let us not be unprepared and disconnected to our source of protection and power. To do so is sinful and dangerous.

The comfort in the face of our sin comes from Jesus. The full armor of God is called "God's" because God has supplied you with it and because, Jesus, wore it himself. As Isaiah wrote, *"He clothed himself with righteousness like armor and wore a helmet of salvation on his head. He dressed in garments for vengeance, and he wrapped himself with zeal like a cloak."* (Isaiah 59:17 EHV) Jesus wore this armor and went to battle in your place. Jesus fought the battle valiantly and won. In Jesus' death on the cross, he defeated the works of the devil. Your sins are forgiven. You are at peace with God. Jesus defeated these spiritual forces. Look to him.

O Church, Arise. In these spiritual battles, move forward knowing that you fight against a defeated enemy. Your God has won. Let this truth drive you to rely upon him in the battle. Go to God consistently and persistently in prayer. He hears you. He loves you. He works for you. Go to God's Word constantly in which he sends his Holy Spirit to strengthen you during this battle. The Word of God is the weapon you have been given, so wield the sword of the Spirit amidst this battles with the evil spiritual forces.

You don't hear the swords clashing and the thunder of horses, but we are amid a fierce battle. The devil and the evil forces fight intensely to destroy us. Stand firm during this battle because your commander,

the Lord of Armies, has already won. **O Church, Arise** to rage against the captor for the weak can say that they are strong. Amen.