



Lamb of God Lutheran Church – Columbus, Ohio  
August 23, 2015 (Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost)

*Preacher: Pastor Timothy Wagner*

*Sermon Text: Ephesians 6:10-20*

*Sermon Theme: Be Strong in the Lord*

---

<sup>10</sup> *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.* <sup>11</sup> *Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.* <sup>12</sup> *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* <sup>13</sup> *Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.* <sup>14</sup> *Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,* <sup>15</sup> *and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.* <sup>16</sup> *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.* <sup>17</sup> *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* <sup>18</sup> *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.* <sup>19</sup> *Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,* <sup>20</sup> *for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*



Our city is starting to buzz again. The Buckeyes are about to begin a new season, this time as the “undisputed national champions” in college football. A team that has had as much success as the Buckeyes have had over the last few years won’t be taken lightly by their opponents. They’ll do everything they can to try to defeat the champion. And so this time of year is very important for them. They need to get in shape, learn their plays, and practice, practice, practice.

But there’s more to it than that. Imagine what would happen if they showed up to their first game without helmets, without shoulder pads, without cleats, without any of the equipment designed to protect them and help them perform. Even the weakest team in college football would have a huge advantage over them. They wouldn’t win without the proper equipment.

Today God wants us to think about something even more important than Buckeye football. And while St. Paul sometimes uses athletic metaphors to describe our lives, the pictures he uses here are images of war. In war, losses mean more than votes from championship committee members or dollars from ticket sales or bowl appearances. In war, losses mean lives.

Some of you have actually spent time in military combat zones. And for that, I thank you. I have never put on a soldier’s uniform. I have never swung a sword or aimed a gun at another human being. But I treasure the freedoms that you have fought for. I dare not overlook or underestimate the sacrifices that you have made, so that I can live in peace.

At the same time, I dare not overlook or underestimate the battles that all of you fight every day. Paul takes us today right to the middle of the battlefield, where you and I are under constant attack. St. Paul describes our enemy this way: **“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”** (v. 12). No matter what differences or disagreements we might have with other people, they aren’t the real enemy. Our real enemy is a spiritual enemy, and his name is Satan. He is powerful. He is smart. He is dangerous. And he’s not alone. The words Paul uses here—rulers, authorities, powers, forces—describe organized ranks of armies launching an all-out assault against us. Those ranks include all of Satan’s fellow fallen angels, the sinful world in which we live, and the sinful nature in our own hearts. It’s a mighty force.

And Paul calls their battle strategy **“the devil’s schemes”** (v. 11). Satan is subtle and sly. He knows our

weaknesses and exploits them. If your weakness is greed and discontentment, he'll dangle that advertisement before your eyes or point out what your neighbor has that you don't. If your weakness is lust, he'll surround you with the kind of people that catch your eye or remind you that you can see them with a quick search of the internet. If you struggle with gossip, he'll help to keep you informed with the juicy bits of information that make conversations interesting.

I don't know the exact temptations that you deal with day in and day out. But I know that the devil plots against you, just as he does against me—at home or at work, at church or at school, when you are reading your Bible or sharing your faith, or when you are reading a magazine or sharing a cup of coffee, when you are doing the things you love or doing the things you do only because you have to. He sees your weaknesses, and he attacks. And he attacks. And he attacks.

And if he doesn't get you to stumble, he doesn't give up. Instead, he hurls the flaming arrow of pride at you, pointing out how much better you are than those others, who did sin. If he does trip you up, he aims the fiery arrow of despair at you, hinting that you can't be a Christian and do the things you've done, that you can't commit as many sins as you have and expect God to keep forgiving you. His hope is that, even if those arrows don't make a direct hit every time, the fire will spread, eventually destroying you and your relationship with your God.

On your own, you're a goner. We can't defend ourselves against an enemy that is as determined and experienced and powerful as the devil, especially as he teams up with our sinful hearts and with the corrupt world we call home. But every time we give in to temptation, we have no one to blame but ourselves, and no outcome to expect but God's eternal punishment for insubordination and rebellion.

Paul wrote these words to warn us, but he didn't write them to frighten us. Instead, he wanted to encourage and equip us for the battles we fight in our hearts every day. He wrote, ***"Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power"*** (v. 10).

Our strength is not in ourselves. It is in our Lord. And our Lord is Jesus Christ. I may not have faced all of the temptations that you have, and you may not have faced all of the temptations that I have. But the Bible says that Jesus ***"has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin"*** (Hebrews 4:15). Satan unleashed all of his forces, when Jesus came into the world. He held nothing back. Every arrow in his quiver, every bullet in his chamber, every bomb in his arsenal, he hurled at Jesus. If he could get him to give in just once, in just one moment of weakness, Satan would win, and we would become his eternal prisoners of war. But Jesus deflected every arrow, avoided every bullet, and diffused every bomb. And, with his sinless death and glorious resurrection to life, he crushed the head of our enemy once and for all.

But here's the best part. He takes his battle armor, and he gives it to us to wear. He fits us with the belt of truth to turn back the devil's lies. He hangs over our hearts the breastplate of his righteousness, his perfect life to defend us against the devil's charges of guilt and unworthiness. He straps on our feet the sandals of gospel peace to calm our hearts when the devil casts a shadow of doubt and uncertainty over us. He puts on our arm the shield of faith, that confidence in Jesus' victory over sin and death that fends off both pride and despair. On our heads, he places that helmet of salvation, crowning us with the rescue that only he could achieve. And finally, he wraps our hand around the very same weapon with which he fought off every one of Satan's attacks—***"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"*** (v. 17).

Dear friends, be strong in the Lord. The full armor of God is yours. And it's all gospel armor. Every piece is connected to what Jesus accomplished for you in his own victory against the devil's schemes. The Holy Spirit dressed you for battle in your baptism. He teaches you how to use your armor, as you watch Jesus fight for you and listen to his encouragement in his Word. And by that same powerful Word, he stands with you, fights for you, and keeps you in him, where neither death nor the devil can reach you.

So, ***"Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes"*** (v. 11). The battle never stops. ***"The fight is fierce, the warfare long"*** (CW 551, st. 5). Keep that armor on, ***"so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to***

**stand**" (v. 13). The day of evil is every day you face temptation—every day of your life. But with the gospel armor of strength and grace, you can overcome temptation. And when your life on earth is over and the war is ended, you will stand in victory with Jesus—his victory for you.

There's one more powerful tool he gives us for the battle. And that's prayer. Like the rest of the gospel armor, its power is in him who has overcome the devil. Paul encourages us not only to pray for ourselves in the hour of battle, but to pray for our fellow soldiers in the trenches of spiritual warfare and to pray for all who proclaim the glorious gospel by which the hearts of believers are defended from all of Satan's attacks. This wonderful gift of prayer reminds us that we don't fight alone. No, we have a God who hears our prayers and defends his people from the devil's deadly assaults. Armed with prayer, we are strong in the Lord.

Fellow soldiers of the cross, no matter how weak or defeated you feel on a daily basis, your strength is in the Lord, and his victory is your victory. And so, "**fight the good fight with all your might,**" knowing that "**Christ is your strength and Christ your light**" (CW 457, st. 1). "**Stand up, stand up for Jesus! The strife will not be long; This day the noise of battle, The next, the victor's song**" (CW 474, st. 4). Be strong in the Lord. Our enemy is real and dangerous. But in Christ he is defeated. And, in his armor, you stand victorious. Amen.

**To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.** Amen. (Revelation 3:21)

## Lessons for August 23

### 2 Kings 11:1-3,12-18

<sup>1</sup> When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family. <sup>2</sup> But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram and sister of Ahaziah, took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes, who were about to be murdered. She put him and his nurse in a bedroom to hide him from Athaliah; so he was not killed. <sup>3</sup> He remained hidden with his nurse at the temple of the LORD for six years while Athaliah ruled the land.

<sup>12</sup> Jehoiada brought out the king's son and put the crown on him; he presented him with a copy of the covenant and proclaimed him king. They anointed him, and the people clapped their hands and shouted, "Long live the king!"

<sup>13</sup> When Athaliah heard the noise made by the guards and the people, she went to the people at the temple of the LORD. <sup>14</sup> She looked and there was the king, standing by the pillar, as the custom was. The officers and the trumpeters were beside the king, and all the people of the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets. Then Athaliah tore her robes and called out, "Treason! Treason!"

<sup>15</sup> Jehoiada the priest ordered the commanders of units of a hundred, who were in charge of the troops: "Bring her out between the ranks and put to the sword anyone who follows her." For the priest had said, "She must not be put to death in the temple of the LORD." <sup>16</sup> So they seized her as she reached the place where the horses enter the palace grounds, and there she was put to death.

<sup>17</sup> Jehoiada then made a covenant between the LORD and the king and people that they would be the LORD's people. He also made a covenant between the king and the people. <sup>18</sup> All the people of the land went to the temple of Baal and tore it down. They smashed the altars and idols to pieces and killed Mattan the priest of Baal in front of the altars.

Then Jehoiada the priest posted guards at the temple of the LORD.

### Ephesians 6:10-20

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

<sup>19</sup> Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

### Luke 12:49-53

<sup>49</sup> "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup> But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! <sup>51</sup> Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. <sup>52</sup> From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. <sup>53</sup> They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against

mother-in-law.”