**13th Sunday after Pentecost – Year C – August 18, 2013 – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Ephesians 6:10-20 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**Vicar Ben Zuberbier’s installation**

**Stand Firm!**

**I. by putting on the armor of God (vs.10-17)**

**II. and by praying in the Spirit (vs.18-20)**

*10 Finally, be strong in the Lord* *and in his mighty power.* *11 Put on the full armor of God* *so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 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.* *13 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. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist,* *with the breastplate of righteousness in place,* *15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.* *16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith,* *with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.* *17 Take the helmet of salvation* *and the sword of the Spirit,* *which is the word of God.* *18 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. 19 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, 20 for which I am an ambassador* *in chains.* *Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

I am an American Soldier.

I am a warrior and a member of a team.

I serve the people of the United States, and live the Army Values.

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills.

I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.

I am an expert and I am a professional.

I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy, the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.

I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.

I am an American Soldier.

This is the US Army Soldier’s Creed. You, young man, are not an American Soldier. But you are a warrior, which is why you are here. What a better place to hone your warrior skills than in Radcliff, KY, surrounded by Fort Knox Army Post, surrounded by a congregation made up of many veterans and active duty Soldiers, who are not only American Soldiers, but Christian warriors with you. These Soldiers know about battle, not just in the jungles of Grenada and Vietnam, the mountains of Korea and Afghanistan, and the deserts of Iraq, but in the day-to-day struggle with the forces of Satan. They requested that their pastor receive a vicar, so that a student from the seminary might, God-willing, be better equipped for battle. And so, young man, I say to you today, **Stand Firm! By putting on the armor of God, and by praying in the Spirit.**

**Stand Firm!**

**I. by putting on the armor of God (vs.10-17)**

In the Apostle Paul’s letter he uses a figure in society Christians at Ephesus were familiar with: the Roman soldier. He was seen on patrol through the city streets, or standing guard at the city walls. He was fully trained, always ready, a professional, most likely a combat veteran, thoroughly equipped for battle. Paul describes his equipment: a belt girded around waist, from which hung the protective armor covering his middle section and thighs; the breastplate, the body armor used to protect the vital organs; his feet equipped with the proper footwear for combat; the shield which was curved to deflect arrows, javelins and projectiles; the helmet of iron to protect the head; and finally, the soldier was equipped with a sword to go on the offensive against the enemy.

This armor was necessary to protect against enemy forces. Similarly it would be unthinkable for a Soldier to walk the mountains of Afghanistan in flip flops, khaki shorts and a t-shirt. Because the enemy is real, and their weapons are designed to kill. That’s why Paul says, “**Put on the full armor of God**.” But Paul wasn’t calling the Christians to arms. The enemy they faced could not be fought with swords or M4s. They could not defend themselves with body armor. They faced an enemy more powerful than any army on earth.

Paul describes the enemy in vs12, “**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.”** These are the spiritual special forces of evil: Satan, the prince of this world, as the Bible calls him, and his horde of evil angels. They are a strong and formidable force, intelligent, they strike unexpectedly and with great precision. They are intent on attacking you and me and all of these gathered here.

You cannot defend against their weapons on your own. They lay the IEDs (improvised explosive device) of false doctrine. They are ever so subtle. They tempt you to crawl close by making you look at everything that is going on in the world, in our society and try to get you to ask, “Did God really say that you have to do that? Because everyone else in society says it’s ok! Did God really say you can’t do this? Because society is really acceptable of most things.” And you step on that round and it explodes in your face. They fire the rounds of hardship and sickness and make you question, “Can God really protect you?” They will bring the pressures of ministry upon you and ask you, “Ben Zuberbier, do you really want to be a pastor? Are you really fit for this? Do you have the strength for it? Cause we are going to come at you every single day of your life, until the day you either resign in shame or they lay your body in the ground.” This enemy will discourage you, and tempt you in order to break you.

That’s why Paul encourages the Christians to put on the full armor of God. This armor, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith: these are all things God has done for you, things that he has given you. This armor means going back to God and being strengthened by his promises to protect and strengthen you. God strengthens you through the use of his Word and Sacraments.

The problem is that at times we actually take pieces of that armor off. We set them aside. In our sinful pride we actually think we can engage in battle on our own. Think about this… you’re a PK, a preacher’s kid, you can do this. You got this. You will use God’s Word every day, preparing Bible studies, sermons, devotions, catechism lessons, you will always be assisting others with their armor. But if you do not stop and take time to put on your own armor and acquaint yourself with God’s armor and put it on for yourself, you will not stand.

Ask how many of our members have done this… the member who has buried a spouse, a loved one, women who have suffered through miscarriage, members whose children have sat in jail, members who have endured surgery after surgery and test after test, and think, “I got this. I can get through this on my own. I don’t need God’s help either.” That’s especially when the devil launches his attacks. Unless we are strengthened by study of his Word and receiving the Lord’s Supper, we will join the ranks of those who are unqualified for combat.

If you drive onto Fort Knox, through the Wilson Gate, and head back to the basic training barracks, you’ll find a building called *Olive Theater*, named in honor of PFC Milton Olive III, who served in Vietnam with the 503rd Infantry. One day he was on patrol with his platoon and were suddenly under fire from the Viet Cong. Although the platoon was pinned down temporarily, it retaliated by assaulting the Viet Cong positions, causing the enemy to flee. As the platoon pursued the insurgents, PFC Olive and four other soldiers were moving through the jungle together with a grenade was thrown into their midst. PFC Olive saw the grenade and he grabbed the grenade in his hand and fell on it to absorb the blast with his body. Through his bravery, unhesitating actions, and complete disregard for his safety, he prevented additional loss of life or injury to the members of his platoon.

That’s what Jesus has done for you. Jesus marched out on to the battleground all by himself, the lone Soldier, wrestling in hand-to-hand combat with the devil, using only the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and thoroughly defeated him. He did not fail to find strength in his Father’s promises. He always found strength in his Father and relied on him.

And at the end of his life, although he is the Almighty God, he allowed Satan and his forces to attack him and tear him to pieces with all the torments of hell. He endured round after round of guilt and sin that impacted into his very soul, our sins of pride and self-reliance. There he hung on the cross and in a sense laid aside his armor, allowed himself to be surrounded by his enemies, and he let death capture his body. Why? Because he loves you. Because he wanted to spare you this torment, to rescue you from Satan’s attacks, to keep you safe and secure. And he has. He proved it by rising from the dead. By his resurrection he destroyed the enemy grave. It cannot contain you forever.

By his suffering and death you are the victorious Soldier over Satan, you are victorious over his temptations, you are victorious over death and grave already, because Jesus, the commander-in-chief, went and laid down on the grenade of your sins, and spared you.

Although the enemy has been defeated by Christ, they know they will lose in the end, they continue to wage war against us, the Soldiers under Christ’s command. They continue to attack us. Paul said, **“When the day of evil comes,”** the day of evil is today! Every day the devil leads his demons in an assault on you. So Paul marches us into God’s weapon depot and he gives us armor capable of defending our souls against this enemy, vs10-11 **“Be strong in the Lord,”** literally, **“continue to be strengthened by the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”** Stand firm by putting on the full armor of God – the belt, the breastplate, the helmet, the shield - be strengthened by the Lord and in his mighty power. That’s the full of armor of God, his promises, found in his Word and Sacrament. Every day you will go back to Christ in Word and Sacrament and you will find strength in Jesus’ work, in his promises – “**I will strengthen you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”**

And you don’t have to sit in a foxhole waiting for the attack. You can be on the offensive…

Paul says you have **the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.** TheArmy Soldier may use variety of weapons, the M4 rile, the MARK19 grenade launcher, the 240B machine gun. You have a weapon more powerful than those: the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. We heard from the Verse of the Day this morning in Hebrews 4.12, “T**he Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword.”** Stand firm by putting on the full armor of God. Use the Sword of the Spirit. Be faithful in the use of this weapon. Yes, you will be in the Word of God every day preparing for sermons, Bible classes, catechism lessons, but take time for daily devotions for yourself. Become acquainted with your weapon. Know it as well as a US Marine Corps Rifleman, whose creed is: “**T**his is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine.
**M**y rifle is human, even as I, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its weaknesses (good thing about the Sword of the Spirit it has no weaknesses!), its strength (and the Bible is Almighty in strength!), its parts, its accessories, its sights and its barrel. I will ever guard it against the ravages of weather and damage as I will ever guard my legs, my arms, my eyes and my heart against damage. I will keep my rifle clean and ready. We will become part of each other.” Yes, know your weapon, holy Scripture, and know it well, and use it.

**II. and by praying in the Spirit (vs.18-20)**

Another weapon you have in your arsenal is prayer. Prayer is an essential piece of equipment because it accompanies everything that the Christian Soldier does. **And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of payers and requests.** Theimportant part of familiarization with this weapon of prayer is that it can only be given and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Faith is a gift from Holy Spirit. Faith trusts God. Faith confidently approaches the commanding general’s desk with requests and commendations. Unlike the Army where Soldiers have to go through the chain of command, you can go straight to the general with confidence.

Paul says, “**With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” I**n combat the US Army Soldier has a battle buddy, the Soldier next to you on whom you rely to keep you alive, and they you. These people here, these saints, are people who have been made holy by the sacrifice of Christ. They are your battle buddies. Vicar, pray for them first, that God would protect them, that God would move them with Word and Sacrament to put on the full armor of God, that they stand firm with you and me when Satan attempts to find the gap in their armor.

Finally, Paul says, “**Pray for me.”** When Paul wrote this letter he was under house arrest. He was awaiting trial for preaching the good news of Jesus. He didn’t know what would happen to him. He only asked that he be given the right words, that the Holy Spirit would empower him to speak for his commanding general, and to speak the truth boldly. Vicar, I humbly ask that of you, that you pray for me, that I might lead and mentor you, that I might preach and teach the Word of God in all its truth and purity, not only boldly, but faithfully. I will do the same for you.

Because you and I, we are not American Soldiers. But we are Christian warriors. The Holy Spirit has called us to serve this company, this troop, with the Word of God, and equip them with the Word of God, and to hlpe them put on the full armor of God. But you, first, stand firm, by putting on the full armor of God for yourself, and by praying in the Spirit. And God will bless our year together. Amen.