

“Proclaiming the Gospel of Peace”

August 22, 2021

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It's been a long Pandemic year, or year and a half (whatever it is) and it's interesting through that time I worked a lot on making sure we could still have worship. I came to realize one reason why it was so important to me that we had worship, as I read the psalmists words today about being on the threshold, at the door of residing with God, being at God's dwelling place, there is a way in which worship is being there on that threshold. Now, you know, not all of worship in all ways, just because we call this the house of the Lord, doesn't mean we have contained God here. And just because we come to worship doesn't mean we always encounter God. And yet, it is our time when we take and make space and a place for Him in our lives, to sit with God, to recognize there is a way which we are at the threshold of God's dwelling place. God's house. That is one reason, for me, that worship is incredibly important, at times, I'll agree, I find it just as boring as other things, but there are those moments, in the midst of a song, a word from scripture, and the time of prayer, I can feel touched by God. And perhaps you can as well. And yet, perhaps that's enough and we should go home. Yet, the psalmist doesn't stop there, he says that there is a peace to this. It is not just being aware of God's presence or trying to find our way to God's presence, there is some way in which it goes hand in hand with walking uprightly. As he talks about the wonder of living in God's courts, he also talks about living uprightly. And in our world today it feels so much like it goes together, because it feels like the world invites us to walk away from the threshold of God's dwelling place. There seems to be so much in the world that entices, that invites us into a different way of doing things, making our pleasures all that we care about, or that creates fear in our lives. I mean, the pandemic is one thing, but there is also, we went through quite a list in our prayers, a number of the problems in the world today. And it can strike fear into our hearts. How do we deal with all of those things? The desires of our lives and the fears that we hold, how do we deal with all of that?

You know, it's always a little dangerous to make blanket statements, and so, to try to figure out a little bit of what reflects our approach, there are a couple ways to go, one, we could look at what's going on in the world in terms of just armed conflicts. I see a movie now and then, and the previews struck me, about how many of those are about how somebody sees something that is wrong, uses violence to solve the problem, and that's kind of the whole story. And it is better if those people who can solve the problem, are people who have some kind of supernatural powers. What's fascinating to me, because in some ways our society is so absent the supernatural, there is almost a longing it feels like, not longing for God to come and smite everybody, but it's there. It is that glorification of violence and war that I was struck by, and what it means to walk uprightly.

And so, as I began to read through the Ephesians passage I was struck by what it does, it seems to recognize how human beings look to the accoutrements of war, the stuff you put on, the weapons you use, and what it does with that. You see, I think that it takes those and transforms them, sometimes I think we transform them as well, only we transform them back into the means of war. I think we often will take those things, and say, well, that's the way I fight in this world, and yet, those things are not elements of war.

Let me just look at those for a moment. Truth and righteousness, gird yourself with truth and put on the breast plate of righteousness, the things that protect one's body. According to Ephesians, these are not physical things that you put on, but truth, faith, justice, genuineness, the ability to see what is real, and righteousness, the right relationship we have with one another. It goes on to say the shoes, (Is this a typo?) that which enables us to proclaim the gospel of faith. I looked at the word righteousness, and it could also be translated as the foundation, what we walk on, the gospel of peace. It is interesting to think about that as we hear Christ invite us to know God's grace, he is inviting us into the foundation of peace. The good news is that we have that foundation, that God's work is one of harmony. Think about the incredible way this world is put together, intertwined, and that we are invited to be part of that intertwining, to bring the harmony of that out. That is to be our foundation and our shield, our trust in God. These things that protect us are not the physical things, but the experience, faith, the trust in God and God's work in the world, God's son, and the gift of grace.

Then, the helmet of salvation, what protects our head and our ways of thinking. It is the confidence we have in God setting us free from the power of evil, our confidence in salvation, the rescuing that God does. And those are all just protective things. What is the weapon we have? What's the sword? Well, it isn't something we get to wield too readily because it's the Holy Spirit. I don't know about you, but I don't think I'm in control of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us the word, and the will, and the way of God. The weapon we have is what guides us, what shows us the way, what leads us into the world, and lifts us up as those who can live a full and wonderful life. Those are the accoutrements of faith. Trust, righteousness, proclaiming the good news of peace, faith, salvation, and the Spirit giving us the word and will of God.

One of the things I noticed about those, is that the first set, the accoutrements of war, are all physical things, all part of the material world; and the accoutrements of faith are all things that are not physical. We live in a world that feels like it dismisses what's not physical or material. And so, I wonder sometimes if we even have the language to speak about what's not material. I mean, I can use the word spiritual, but I am guessing that it might mean different things to different people. We don't have a set way of seeing it together, and yet, things like trust, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and definitely the Spirit, are not things that we see like I can see a breast plate or a shield. I wonder, especially in our time and place, if we don't need, again, the very healing that Jesus brought when he was coming back, to open the ears, my ears, our ears. And it's interesting that he opened the mans' ears, and then he heals his speech. It is so easy to get caught in our own area of what we think is true and look for the ways to build that up, and that can limit what we hear. Perhaps, I need Jesus to help me hear beyond my own sphere of belief or seeing what's real. For Him to help me hear (should this say here), so that I can have something to say, particularly about the wonder of God's gift of grace, and the surprising gift of forgiving love, that leads us to recognize that we have a foundation of peace. We have a God who will guide us through the evil, as we trust, as we work out the way of living righteously with one another, as we proclaim peace, and as we trust in the salvation. It goes on to invite us to pray. And that that is the avenue to go into these things. And so, as we go into this week, I would invite you to notice the difference that is proclaimed here in Ephesians, to pray for ears to hear so that we might have the words to say, to pay attention, through prayer, to what God is inviting us to do, to hear, and to even find that there might be moments in prayer when we find ourselves in the doorway of God's dwelling. Amen.