

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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If you have any social sense at all, you know that certain occasions and events demand certain kinds and styles and formalities or informalities of the kind of clothing you need to wear. You don't wear a swimsuit to Church, and you don't wear a black tie tuxedo to the beach and jump into the water – unless you are James Bond, of course. The Bible is full of imagery and even specific occasions of the description of appropriate clothing, or in some cases, none at all. Today we hear of one of the most important allegories of clothing you will ever hear to be a strong and stalwart disciple of Jesus Christ.

O Lord, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O God our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Right from the very beginning of the story of humanity in the bible, we discover that clothes make the man; well, no, clothes HIDE the man; well, no, clothes TRY to hide the man. No. Man thinks that certain clothing will hide himself from being seen. As you can see, we sure twist things around.

It's nothing new, and it's nothing old that hasn't gone away. And we still use clothes to in a sense cover up our insecurities, and perhaps our sinfulness; and yet we can also go the opposite direction and try to make use of clothing to proclaim who we really think we are. If you are a very discerning person, no matter what reason people wear what they wear, or don't wear, You can tell a lot about people from the clothes they wear. The clothes that we choose to wear often are attempts to reflect our status, our values, and even our priorities. At Hollywood red carpet events reporters often ask actors and actresses "Who are you wearing?" to find out which designer created the clothes they are wearing. In the ancient world clothing had a similar significance. It could reflect a person's socioeconomic status, mood, or even their character.

Of course, God in the Garden of Eden knew exactly what that fashionable fig leaf was all about, and it had nothing to do with what exquisite fig tree Adam and Eve pulled them from.

The Bible stories and teachings do not shy away from using the examples or even factual recalling of clothing or no clothing. Adam and Eve were just fine being without clothing prior to the mistake of listening to the Serpent who helped Eve get what God said twisted around. You see, I could have said that Adam and Eve were just fine being naked prior to that mistake. But they didn't know what naked meant; and so began the cover up. And as they left the Garden of Eden by God's demand to depart, they would forever need clothing to protect themselves from a world and from situations in the world that would provide no sympathy to their vulnerabilities.

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Even the young man fleeing the Garden of Gethsemane after the scuffle with temple guards, and the arrest of Jesus, would be described as being so scared and wanting to flee so quickly that he lost the little clothing he had on, if only for propriety's sake.

When it comes then to the New Testament, the imagery of clothing is making use of the reality of clothing as safety, and protection, but not in my own strength or means, but in someone else's. I guess that Red Carpet question is actually very profound, when they ask "Who are you wearing?", if the answer is Jesus. I'm wearing Christ.

The New Testament uses clothing imagery to describe different, but closely related, aspects of our relationship with God. Often you will hear the phrase "to put on", which is a way of translating the Geek words that come from *enduo* or *enduno*. It means to "sink into a garment" to "invest in a piece of clothing" or to "vest". We get the word investiture, which then means to take on or put on or surround yourself in some kind of authority or power. That is, to be clothed with...

There seem to be a few major ways to look at this. For one thing, to clothe oneself is used to describe what happens in conversion and baptism. In [Galatians 3:26-27](#) Paul writes that "in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have been clothed in Christ."

Another way, as we have been hearing in Ephesians up to now is a way to graphically describe the transformation that results from our relationship with Jesus Christ. Contrasting one way of living for another, Paul instructs the believers to "put on" or "Clothe yourself in" the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires". Paul even describes what it looks like, that is, what that clothing of Christ looks like, "Put on then, or clothe yourselves with, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, and with kindness; clothe yourselves in humility, meekness, and patience" ([Col 3:12](#)). Now there is an example of truly wearing the clothing that shows our status, our status as those who are holy, chosen and loved by God.

And then, clothing imagery describes the transformation of our bodies that will take place when we are resurrected from the dead. In a very familiar set of verses from first Corinthians 15, often read at funerals, Paul explains that "this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality" ([1 Cor 15:53](#)). In the meantime, as we await that day, "we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" ([2 Cor 5:2-4](#)).

In trusting in Christ, and taking on the qualities of Christ, and looking for that hope of being clothed in a new resurrection body, we hear clothing as signs of protection, holy status, transformational. At this point, nakedness is actually a sign of the lack of this relationship with Christ, or a folly of thinking that even as a disciple, I don't have to worry about what comes my way.

And this is where this last section of the letter to the Ephesians comes to us today.

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It is said that the Picts of Ancient northern Britain, roughly equivalent to what we call Scotland today, would paint themselves up, but then fight naked, hoping not to get caught in mountainous brush while rushing the enemy, but also to quite frankly scare off their enemies, looking and acting like crazy men. Their tactics are probably a study in why their culture is hardly recognizable any more. Even the highlanders where kilts aren't worn into war any more.

In other words, going into battle without clothing is not really such a good idea.

One of the most startling but hilarious tee-shirts I've ever seen was one that actually made this case. The manufacturer of this battle philosophy sold tee-shirts boldly printed on the front with the words: DON'T FIGHT NAKED.

Of course, the words DON'T FIGHT NAKED on the front were designed to give the words on the back a more profound impact. On the back was a quotation from what we heard today in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians:

Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Brilliant.

That is, CLOTHE YOURSELF with the whole armor of God. The message is, in a manner of speaking, "Don't fight naked against evil powers." Even as a Christian, who believes they are clothed in Christ, covered by the Blood of Jesus. But that's just it. Even thinking of being covered by the Blood of the Lamb is in fact a covering, a clothing. We are told, then, that this battle of living as a Christian, eyes wide open to the missteps, the temptations, the horrors of an unfair world, the ease of sin, and staying true to Christ, must be waged with extraordinary clothing, with the Christian warrior being dressed in armor. Armor that comes from God.

As the Epistle makes clear, our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places. These words are New Testament language for all the forces and powers and urges and temptations and impulses and cravings and desires

- that draw us away from God
- that push us toward doing what is wrong
- that prevent us from loving God and our neighbor.

.....All the opposites of the clothing we have put on in Christ, as I mentioned earlier. This is in fact the enemy's objective. To undermine our status in Christ.

We need God's armor for life's inner battles, spiritual conflicts, battles of the heart and mind and will. These are fights we dare not undertake naked.

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By whatever measure, we cannot deal with life's many challenges completely by ourselves. We have to heed the lesson taught in Ephesians, the lesson that pledges God's help for us in our battles: help that is given freely, help that is ours for the taking. As Christians, we have available to us the very armor of God, clothing that the author of Ephesians symbolizes as:

- The belt of truth
- The breastplate of righteousness
- Shoes for proclaiming the gospel of peace
- The shield of faith
- The helmet of salvation, and
- The sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.
- as well, Pray in the Spirit, at all times

The image of armor is the Bible's way of revealing what we have available to us--all the resources God offers:

- Love
- Forgiveness
- Peace
- Reconciliation
- Blessing
- Joy
- Hope

This section of Ephesians has been an important daily part of my personal prayer life. What is insidious is to realize a few times in my life, like just preparing for this sermon today, that what was an essential element of my prayers, had actually disappeared, and I couldn't tell you how long it had been! The enemy doesn't want to have us literally pray through the clothing in the armor of Christ. How in the world did it get away for me? It may be the devil, but I can only blame myself. Just one day I wasn't paying attention, and I didn't stand firm. I wasn't watchful. But now I have a renewed resolve to be steadfast, so I can in fact stand in Christ, firm.

We won't be perfect, of course, like Jesus Christ. But we should expect the battle as Jesus had to battle and expected it. It is Good News that God empowers us in such a way that we need not march naked into the spiritual battles of life.

To finish, Let me share one version of how that prayer might go for you.

Lord, I put on the whole armor of God that I may stand clothed in Christ.

I put the breastplate of righteousness over my heart and I thank you for the garment, for I have none of my own.

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I put the belt of truth around my waist that I may stand secure;

I put the shoes of the gospel of peace and wholeness on my feet that I may go forth and proclaim the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. Any time, any place, any where.

I put the helmet of salvation on my head and bring my mind into the captivity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I take up the shield of faith to quench the fiery darts of the enemy..

I take the sword of spirit which is sharper than any two edged sword, piercing and discerning the intentions of my heart; and fending off the evil that comes.

I receive your Holy Spirit to clothe my tongue; Let me thus sing with Prayer in your Spirit, that I may know beyond my own knowing how to pray for myself, my family, my family in Christ the church, that they too may be fully clothed in Christ, and they may also stand firm in Christ.

Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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