

Joshua 1:9

I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Ephesians 6:10-18

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power; **11** put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, **12** for our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. **13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on the evil day and, having prevailed against everything, to stand firm. **14** Stand, therefore, and belt your waist with truth and put on the breastplate of righteousness **15** and lace up your sandals in preparation for the gospel of peace. **16** With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench 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** Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

Secondary Reading - excerpt from [On Evil Spirits](#) - Sermon by John Wesley

The "god of this world" knows how to blind our hearts, to spread a cloud over our understanding, and to obscure the light of those truths which, at other times, shine as bright as the noonday sun. By this means he assaults our faith, our evidence of things unseen.

...

Next to the love of God, there is nothing which Satan so cordially abhors as the love of our neighbor. He uses, therefore, every possible means to prevent or destroy this; to excite either private or public suspicions, animosities, resentment, quarrels; to destroy the peace of families or of nations; and to banish unity and

concord from the earth. And this, indeed, is the triumph of his art; to embitter the poor, miserable children of men against each other, and at length urge them to do his own work, to plunge one another into the pit of destruction.

...

as a general preservative against all the rage, the power, and subtlety of your great adversary, put on the panoply, "the whole armor of God," universal holiness.

...

To his "fiery darts," -- his evil suggestions of every kind, blasphemous or unclean, though numberless as the stars of heaven, -- oppose "the shield of faith." A consciousness of the love of Christ Jesus will effectually quench them all.

Jesus hath died for you! What can your faith withstand? Believe, hold fast your shield! and who Shall pluck you from his hand?

As Mainline Protestants, we are often hesitant to acknowledge this part of our tradition that describes the 'spiritual forces of wickedness' as 'evil angels,' or 'Satan,' but perhaps anthropomorphizing these spiritual forces, we make them seem more defeat-able than they do as nebulous 'spiritual forces.' And, not acknowledging them at all disempowers us from resisting them, or noticing when they are at work in the world around us, or in our own hearts.

- Rev. Mike Roberts shared with us that reports of possession by evil spirits happen more frequently in countries that are colonized. Which, we could interpret in a variety of ways, some less generous than others. I think most obviously, most plainly, we can observe that military forces taking possession of a land, being occupied as a people by a foreign entity, does the same thing to people as evil spirits; that occupation of a land for exploitation is evil.

There is so much suspicion and doubt about the existence of systemic racism. And I think in part because it is a concept, it is an idea. If we said that the system, the bodies of institutions are occupied or possessed by an evil spirit, perhaps there is something to do about that. Where is systemic racism? Can we cut it out surgically? Doesn't seem so. Possessed by evil spirits though? There's something to do, an exorcism, an eviction, a cleansing is needed and can be effectual.

Nonetheless, the acknowledgment of spiritual forces of wickedness is central to our tradition, denounced most fervently in our baptismal vows: where we are asked to resist

evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. If so, say I do.

More broadly, evil is contended with very directly in the scriptures; even here in Ephesians, Paul names them the “cosmic powers of this present darkness.” It must be acknowledged and reckoned with. My favorite evil spirit story is the story of the Geresene demoniac - a man chained up out in the cemetery because he was all but dead. A person tortured by a ‘legion’ of evil spirits - legion is another word for a military unit - a person who had been occupied and colonized by a foreign entity, and was so plagued by that experience he practiced self-harm, self-mutilation. In this story, Jesus speaks: “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” Jesus speaks courageously and commandingly: come out of the man. But Jesus also speaks truthfully, naming what is within him clearly: “you unclean spirit.”

- A friend, having said yes to a call to ministry, immediately started experiencing sleep paralysis. Interpreted and experienced it as spiritual warfare, an evil spirit sitting on her chest, paralysing her, taking her breath from her. The power of the name of Jesus, who is the truth. And naming the spirit for what it is. “Get behind me, Satan.” “Jesus is Lord here. You have no authority here.” “Evil Spirit, get out!”
- But in order to do this, in order to speak authoritatively in the presence of evil, we have to believe that we have what we need, that we are exactly prepared for this moment. We have to believe that the defensive weapons God has given us are enough to destroy evil.

- Meditate: Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on the evil day and, having prevailed against everything, to stand firm. **14** Stand, therefore, and belt your waist with truth and put on the breastplate of righteousness **15** and lace up your sandals in preparation for the gospel of peace. **16** With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench 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** Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.
- How does that feel?

In a world plagued by war and genocide, manufactured famine and discriminatory brutality, it generates courage to be invited into a faithful response of resistance, fighting back, dismantling, opposing. Paul's instruction to put on the whole armor of God is not mild nor passive. Instead, it is an active resistance and wielding of defensive and offensive weapons against all that seeks to steal, kill, and destroy. These weapons are not the same as weapons of war, but are subversive to and disarming "against all the rage, the power, and subtlety" of the spiritual forces of wickedness, the evil spirits.

This reality, this world at this time, where "cosmic powers of this present darkness" act with "rage," "power, and subtlety," demands that people of faith lead courageously. Courage is necessary ONLY BECAUSE evil is scary to face.

But courage is only so powerful without leadership. Our resistance and dismantling of evil will take vision, strategy, empowerment, and encouragement; all the tasks of a leader. It will take all people of goodwill, acting together, toward our shared vision of a future where the spiritual forces of goodness reign, with wisdom and courage to defeat the spiritual forces of wickedness. It will require all of our leadership.

- That baptismal vow asking you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves starts like this: Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you...
- Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you... to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?

The world is not saved by timid observance, by hand-wringing, or pearl clutching. It's just not. It is not rescued by one hero. Peace is not made by dropping bombs. The kingdom of God comes through the body of Christ, the whole body of Christ, wearing the Armor of God, leading courageously.