**Intro – I’m In the Lord’s Army**

* Who all here knows about Pioneer Clubs? Where I grew up, up in the Interlake in a then little town called Arborg, my church, Arborg Christian Fellowship, would hold them every year. What it was for those of you who do not know was a kind of overtly Christian boy and girl scouts. You would earn badges for learning different skills. My mom, who is here with us this morning, was the director in our church for a good number of years, so I ended up with an above average number of badges if I am remembering correctly…Which judging by that look I may not be. I plead forgetfulness. I am thinking back…over 20 years now...man has it been that long!
* The reason I bring that up is because of a song I learned in clubs. And I am going to warn you now because things are about to get rather awkward, because I am about to sing a children’s song fp here. Feel completely free to sing along if you know it, as well as to applaud when it is over. The song I am talking about is “I’m in the Lord’s Army” It goes like this.
* “I’m too young to fight in the infantry, ride with the cavalry, shoot the artillery. I’m too young to fly o’er the enemy, but I’m in the Lord’s Army. Yes Sir! I’m in the Lords army, Yes Sir! I’m in the Lords army. I’m to young to fight in the infantry, ride with the cavalry, shoot the artillery. I’m too young to fly o’er the enemy, but I’m in the Lords army!”..
* And my applause! Thank you! Thank you! You can really tell that Pioneer Clubs, assuming that Is where the song even comes from originally, is not a good Mennonite organization, can’t you? There is not a hint of pacifism in that one. My wife tells me that she also sang that song in the Baptist church she grew up in, so that might explain all that military talk!
* Either way, I have regaled you all with my wonderful rendition of this song because it fits pretty well with that I will be talking about both this Sunday as well as next. For my inaugural two Sundays we will be talking about, as was just wonderfully read, Ephesians 6:10-18. We will be talking about the Armour of God. We will be spending two Sundays talking about this section because, that is probably the least amount of time to spend on this passage and still give it the attention it deserves. There is a lot going on in this passage to say the least, and unfortunately, given the fame of this passage, it is a section that is very often either skimmed over, belittled, or completely and utterly misinterpreted.
* So, to remedy this problem, I propose the following. Let’s split this passage right down the middle. This Sunday let’s tackle just the first three verses. 10-13. That might sound like an awful lot of time to spend on just three verses, but trust me it will be worth it. And then next Sunday, to whet your appetite in advance, lets do the remaining, 14-18 where the armor is actually put on.
* And so let’s just jump right in. If you have your Bible’s accessible or your phones handy, turn with me once again to Ephesians and let us read 6:10-13 together just so it is freshened for us again.

**Scripture - Ephesians 6:10-13**

The Armor of God

**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.

**Four Points that Pop**

* Alright. When we read this passage, I think it is safe to say that there are a couple things that jump out at us right away. But for the sake of getting home for our madda schloppe in good time today, let us just focus on four.
* The first that jumps out at me is right there in the first verse, “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power!” This is one of the keys to understanding what Paul is getting at when he talks about the armour of God. The armour of God is exactly that. It is the armour given to us by a mighty God, by the mighty God, by a God who is overwhelmingly strong, so strong that he does not need us even in the slightest, but still in his wisdom he chooses us, his church, to pick up his mantle and to fight beside him against those who would tear down his creation. We read in John 15:5 that we can do nothing without him, and this is a notion that we should read into here. We are given by God through his continuing work on our behalf and in us and through us the equipment that we need to fight the enemy, to fight to further his kingdom.
* As we read in today’s passage, as well as 10-18 as a whole, as we put on the armour of God, as we are clothed in God’s holiness, it reads like we are being baptised. Like we are being anointed with the power we need to do his will…which reminds me before I forget…get ready for an in-sermon plug. If any of you are looking to be baptised, please come talk to me, or call, text or email me about it. I am hoping to start up a baptism class in the fall, and baptisms, like friends, are always kind of a more the merrier type of situation…and plug done, which leads us well into our next point!
* Point two. When we read the Bible, we tend to read it as talking only to us as individuals and not collectively as the church. I do not know about you, but I know I am often guilty of this. I blame North American culture for this personally, but at a certain point it is on me a bit. But doing that without knowing we are doing that is very often very bad! When we read the Bible, and this is very important. We must remember to always pay attention to the pronouns! What I mean by that is this. In this passage, Paul is talking to the Ephesians as a whole, not to any one person. When you read the Bible, always pay special attention to whether the person talking is talking to one person or to a group of people! Here is why. God is not equipping lone heroes to go it on their own in this passage. He is equipping a whole army. He is equipping the whole church. We often think of Christianity as a kind of “It is just me and God against the world” And while it may often feel that way, know that as a Christian you are always, always, always in the good company of some odd 2.2 billion other people world wide. Many who feel the same way you do.
* We have a tendency to see things in terms of “how can I benefit from this” or “how can I grow from this” and there is nothing wrong with that. But if Paul is saying this to the church, there is a reason for that. There is something about being together, something about being the church, something about being together one in this mighty God, in Our mighty God, that makes us more, makes the armour of God just that much more potent.
* This leads us now to our next point. Point three. If we together, the Church, are the army, equipped by our mighty God, we have to wonder who is it we are being called to stand against? And notice that word Stand, it is used a whole pile of times in this passage. We are called to stand against, and also to struggle against a whole host of enemies in verses 11, and 12. Again we read
* **“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.”
* …This part of the passage is a lot of the reason that I have in the past tended to skim over this section, reading it metaphorically and leaving it at that. When we see the word ‘Devil’ or ‘Satan’, in many of us our minds often jump into the abstract and leave it at that, but let’s take a few moments now and unpack this.
* We read that we are to stand against the schemes of the Devil, of Diabolou in Greek, of the slanderer, of the one who throws things into confusion. We read we are to stand against the rulers who are our kings, our authorities, our governments, against the powers of the dark world, the world that has descended into sin, as well as the forces of evil in the heavenly realms. As to that last one about the heavenly realms, at the point in time Ephesians was written, that phrase would not have meant heavens as in heaven, but instead the forces that are above us, that have power over us.
* In this passage, it is possible to read it in two very different ways. It is possible to read all of the things that we are to fight against as purely spiritual. As Satan and the demons fighting against the forces of God. There is nothing wrong with reading it like this. In fact, I have very little doubt that this is largely how Paul meant it. There are spiritual forces that oppose the work of the Lord, and as the church it is our job to stand against those forces, to fight to further the kingdom. However, to read it just like that, which is something that many recent traditions have done, would be to miss an awful lot of what Paul is trying to get at in this passage.
* And that is because it is also possible to read the passage as talking about human institutions. About the kings and queens, about the emperors, presidents, and CEOs. About dictators and all those who would slander God, who would work to lead us astray… This is also an equally valid way to read this passage and I truly in my heart believe that Paul is talking about both. The enemies of God that we are to stand against as the church are all those who oppose his good work. All those who would seek to hinder him. All those who would seek to tear down the kingdom…
* What I find equally interesting about this passage, though, is that the one group that Paul does not call out as the enemy in this passage are those of Flesh and Blood. This is very important to note. Often in the past this passage has been used as a justification of war, or as a reason to persecute other people, or as an excuse for violence, but it really isn’t, it really can’t be, because of this mention. The one group we are not to fight against are people. They are not the enemies in this passage, but instead they are the victims of the powers and the principalities. We are to fight the systems that hurt people, that see them as less than the children of God that they are, not the people themselves. We are to fight against the powers that make monsters that seek to hurt others, but we are to always strive to bring those afflicted into the love of Christ. It is those people who we are fighting to Save for Christ.
* And that brings us to our fourth point. And this is something that will come up probably more next Sunday. Notice how active this passage sounds. We are to stand against. We are to struggle against. We are called to put on the armour. We are to be strong in the mighty God. This active language is very important to note because it tells us that this is a fight that we are in, we will continue to be in and is not over yet by any means. This is a fight that we are to actively participate in. When we read about armor we often think of it as something that is just used to make our lives easier, but that is far from what this passage tells us. The armor of God is not to help us take a comfortable sideline in the war, but to help us to stand strong to keep fighting for the glory of God…

**Summary of what we just learned**

* And those are the four things that pop out at me as I read. Now, as some of you know who have heard me preach before, I am a pretty big fan of summarizing things in my own words. It helps me remember things that I would otherwise forget almost instantly.
* If I were to do that with this passage after hearing what we just went over, I would say something like the following:
* We follow a mighty God, we follow the mightiest of Gods. This God who is so absolutely overwhelming with power that he could take on the entirety of the evils of creation without batting an eye, but in his infinite wisdom, knowledge, presence and power he has chosen us, together, his Church, to be his army in fighting against those who attack his Holy Kingdom. The devil, the demons, the corrupted, the fallen rulers, governments, and corporations seek to tear down God’s good work and to enslave humanity in their wicked ways. But through the power of God most high, equipping us in his armour, together, his church, we will have the strength to struggle against the enemy, to free those who have fallen victim to their ways, and to stand tall until things are in the end made right.
* If I were to sum up what we have discussed, I would say it is something like that, but I encourage you to come and tell me if you would sum it up differently.

**How Does this Affect Me?**

* Summaries I find, go a long way in making sense of thing, and not only that, but to helping find ways to adapt what it is I have learned to use in every day life. Which brings us now to the bread and butter of the sermon, to asking what does any of this mean to us here today. What is it what we should take from this Sunday and bring home with us. What from this passage we have read, from Ephesians 6:10-13, what can we take away from here today?
* Now to that question, I am going to say that there will be a lot more to take away next week then this one right now, but I am not about to let you go away with nothing on my first Sunday here. I mean, could you imagine? That would be a terrible career choice!
* So I am going to say the following two things, and I think they are gooders, so if you have a pen and paper, or if you have your phones or tablets out, I invite you to take these two things down.
* The first is this. I want to reiterate a point I made earlier and delve in a little more. Do not ever, even for one moment think that you are going this Christian journey alone. Do not think that you are putting on that armour alone, for everyone here today, every brother and sister in Christ in MacGregor, in North Norfolk, In Southern Manitoba, in Manitoba, Canada, North America and the whole wide world, we are all together the army of God. Life can be lonely, and strangely enough, sometimes Christian life can seem even lonelier. Whether it be because of the work of the enemy, or, and this can be even more heartbreaking, other Christians, it can be so painfully hard to feel you are going it alone. Know that you are not. I am here, we are here, our brother’s and sister’s from Bagot, Austin and Portage are here. It is hard to go it alone. Together we can take the sword of God.
* In line with that, being that community, being the church, assumes a certain amount of unity, a certain amount of security, and a certain amount of obligation. We are all called to act toward each other with the same truth, righteousness, readiness, peace, faith, drive to spread Christ’s salvation and the word of God that we are equipped with to face the world. I am going to say this, and I will likely say it again and again as it is one of those things I like to drone on about. We as the church seem to be good at either treating our enemies well, or at treating our friends well but seemingly rarely both. I have been guilty of this, and I have been a good many places that have also been like this, and it is painfully wrong. Christ is calling us in this passage to be in his army, to spread his good news to everyone, to spread his love to everyone. That goes just as much for our brothers and sisters in the church as it does for those outside of it. It is a dangerous thing to do, to be the church, to say we are Christians while at the same time not acting as that means we should. It is a bit like awe are diplomats passing off our own thoughts as those of our country. That’s how wars no one wants get started, and we do it all the time. To be the church means we need to fight this urge with all we are and treat everyone as we wish to be treated.
* And Second, and this one was a bit harder for me to nail down, but with some help from Evelyn on Friday, I think I got it. This point is very much so in line with the first point. We are called to fight against the enemy, against those who oppose the work of God, against those who seek to tear down the kingdom…Now, it is all well and good to say that, but how do we know who the enemy is? All throughout history, probably in your lives, and I know in mine there have been times when I was sure I was fighting that good fight, but in in the end it turned out I was simply railing against something I personally disagreed with or someone I didn’t understand. Again, we are in the same situation as we were before. To fight in the name of God against something that is not the enemy… it is to put our words in God’s mouth. It is in some small way saying that we are God, and that is a very, very seriously bad thing to do. If this ever does happen, treat it with the gravity it deserves! Be very forthcoming with apology and prayer. Do whatever it takes to set things right.
* But with that said, how do we know who the enemy is vs. just someone or something we are personally opposed to? We will know because of two things. We will know because of the guiding of the Holy Spirit, which means spend time in your Bible, Pray with everything you are, and take time to listen for him, and also, and this is the part that is very often forgotten by many of us, listen to the guiding of our fellow believer’s in the Church, both local and at large, both alive and the wisdom and the writings of the past. A single soldier can mishear an order from their commander, but a whole army? That is far less likely…
* And in line with that. I have another quick pitch to make. While I am by no means the entire church, I am more than happy to be a sounding board if you want me to be. My office hours will be from 9:30-12:30 Tuesdays and Thursdays and all day Wednesdays. If those times really don’t work, feel free to come talk to me, or to give me a call, text or email, and we will work something out.

**Conclusion – Take Home Assignment**

* Consider the second pitch now over. On a personal note, I truly want to thank you all for calling me to be your pastor. This means more to me…to us… than you know. I look forward to getting to know all of you and serving you as best I can over the time to come.
* And with that I think we have learned about as much as we will all remember from these three verses. If you have any questions, or concerns about what I said, I encourage you to come and track me down either after the service or during the week. I would be more than appreciative to hear from you.
* And now to keep in line with what any of you who have heard me preach here before know, get ready for your take home assignment. For those of you who have not been here with me before, know I like to send you off with a couple of questions about the passage, because I have found it is a more effective way to engage with the bible than just hoping to remember everything that my boring mug just said.
* As such, my first question is this: “In what way does knowing that this passage is talking about us together as the Church change how you read it compared to if you were reading it to be just about yourself?” That is a question that is going to be very easy for some of you and very hard for others, and if it either of those extremes I invite you to examine why that might be.
* And second, and this one is probably the better of the two: “What would the type of Church who could stand against the enemy look like to you, but even more importantly than that, how would you work to build it?”
* If any of you feel you want to share your answers to those questions, I invite you to track me down. And look forward to next week when we will be continuing these themes on until verse 18, when the entire armour of God is equipped. I assure you, it will be riveting to me.
* And with that, let’s pray.