

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
August 1, 2021

Greetings brothers and sisters in Christ.

Worship is now in the sanctuary beginning at 9:30 (summer hours).

Procedures and Requirements for In-Door Worship

- Masks are optional.
- Three hymns will be sung. Masks are required when singing.
- Sign in on sign-up sheets that will be on the table as you enter the church.
- Pick up your bulletin and communion kit at the table in the Gathering Area
- Place your offering in the offering plate at the table in the Gathering Area
- Sit only in designated seating places (if you are sitting with more than two people, please sit on the sides)
- Greet and visit with people before or after worship outside
- The air conditioning will be on.
- The service will be on-line for those not yet comfortable being inside.
 - In order to not overload the internet, please either power down your phones or put them on Airplane Mode.
 - Also, so that the people who are joining us on-line can hear the congregational responses and announcements, a worship leader/reader will lead the congregational responses and all announcements must be made at the pulpit.

Sign-Up for the 175th Celebration Worship and Picnic – August 15th at 10:00 a.m. In honor of our ministry together with Good Shepherd UCC, we will be having a joint worship service followed by a picnic with a catered lunch at Jim Dietrich park on August 15th at 10:00 a.m. Hope to see you there.

Church Directory – JoAnne has been updating our current church directory and will be providing updated hard copies of the directory later this month. Please check to see if your information on the master copy on the table in the Gathering Area is correct.

Worship Leaders – We are in need of people to help lead worship by reading both the congregational responses and the lessons. Please let Kathy Bobeck know if you are willing to volunteer.

If you have prayer requests, please send them to me so that I can include them in my weekly newsletters.

God's Work, Our Hands – October 12th.

We are assembling packages for our military families for God's Work-Our Hands Sunday, on Oct. 10th. Deadline to bring in items is Oct. 3rd.

Hygiene Items: dental floss, chap stick, small bottles of Tylenol or Advil, tooth paste in small tubes, Band-Aids, vitamin C tablets in small bottles, sunscreen in small tubes, cold meds in small bottles, blister packs, other medical items in small packets. No toothbrushes, hand sanitizer, or liquids.

Candy items: (all individually wrapped) hard candy, mints, chocolates, small candy bars, tootsie rolls, Hershey kisses.

Cotton socks-white or black, calf high, all sizes for adults.

These items have to be small enough to fit into a sandwich bag. They will then be packed into Christmas stockings. Boxes are available in the gathering area to receive your gifts. A grant of \$250. from Thrivent Financial will help us purchase items to "round out" what is needed to make up the contents for 100 stockings. The Witness Committee thanks you for your support of this project.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Denise

Home Phone

610-750-6432

Cell/Text Phone

610-858-818

Ephesians 6:10-20

10-12 And that about wraps it up. God is strong, and he wants you strong. So take everything the Master has set out for you, well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way. This is no weekend war that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.

13-18 Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith,

and salvation are more than words. Learn how to apply them. You'll need them throughout your life. God's Word is an *indispensable* weapon. In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out.

19-20 And don't forget to pray for me. Pray that I'll know what to say and have the courage to say it at the right time, telling the mystery to one and all, the Message that I, jailbird preacher that I am, am responsible for getting out.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father
and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN.

I must confess that although throughout my Sunday School days, I loved singing Onward Christian Soldiers. We had little flags with crosses on them we would carry and wave them as we marched around the Sunday School room. One of my fondest memories.

However, in more recent years I have found the notion of going to war with anything or anyone sanctioned by the cross of Jesus offensive. So, in spite of my fond Sunday School memories of singing that song, I now find those words quite heretical.

Until this week, when I have not only been faced with pondering Paul's words from the 6th chapter of Ephesians for preaching this morning, but have also spent some time reflecting on this

passage with the contemporary theologian N. T. Wright's commentary on this text.

Which has shed some new light on not only what Paul was talking about, but what I was actually singing about as a child.

First of all, it is not about the wars that we read about in the old testament, it is not about the wars that have been fought throughout the centuries, it is not about military action taken against any neighbor or nation being sanctioned by the cross of Christ, but it is war against the evil and corruption in this world that in many cases has resulted in military action which have caused our brothers and sisters to be harmed physically, mentally or spiritually.

And Paul is telling us that first of all we need to acknowledge that such evil not only exists in the world, but it is pervasive, and we bump into it all the time. This evil and corruption is real, and it constantly fights for a place in our hearts, in our lives and in our communities. Its purpose is to instill in us that which divides, separates, demeans and oppresses. We need to be prepared to stand up to this devil in our midst, not only to protect ourselves, but also to protect our neighbors and our communities.

Paul also reminds us that God has equipped us to do just that by providing us with weapons for these battles, which are truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation. He instructs the Ephesians to embrace these weapons and learn how to apply them in the small battles, so that they can be prepared for the larger battles when they encounter this evil and corruption in their communities.

N.T. Wright uses the image of a suit of armor to describe how we have been equipped for battle.

And if you can picture for a moment a medieval warrior going into battle, see that suit of armor, with the helmet, the breast plate, the belt, the shoes, the shield and the sword.

In the words of N.T. Wright this image helps us to understand how God is both protecting us from the evil and corruption of the world and at the same time preparing us for the battles that will ensue.

The first weapon we are equipped with is the truth. The primary thing about the Christian message is that is truth. Never give up on the sheer truth of the gospel that God loves you so much that he sent his Son to come and die for you, so that you may forever and for always be in right relationship with God. Wright tells us that this is like the belt on our suit of

armor for it holds everything else together and in place.

The second piece of equipment is that of justice or righteousness. This isn't just virtue or doing the right thing, although those characteristics and practices are vitally important. But, it's the fact that the one true God is on a mission to restore all of the world. The process began with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus when we were made right with God. Through the teachings of Jesus, we have learned of the justice and goodness of God and knowing that God is good (all the time) is like a breast plate protects our hearts from any frontal attack.

Third is the "gospel of peace". That is the peace we have with God and the peace that now existed in Paul's world between previously hostile groups. The evil one will do anything to make you stumble and doubt yourself and your beliefs. Holding fast to the gospel of peace it like good

boots or shoes that you need to keep from stumbling when you are walking over rocky or unstable terrain.

The next is the shield of faith, that is your belief in the risen Lord. To defeat you, the defenders of evil and corruption will throw anything at you to entice you to come over to their way of thinking and acting. These attacks are like fiery arrows that seemingly come out of nowhere in your moments of despair and weakness. And it is your believing in the one who is the truth, the way and the life that will be your shield to deflect these fiery attacks.

Next is the helmet of salvation, which we have received as pure gift through our adoption into God's family. Being a beloved child of God, you know you have already been rescued. This knowledge will carry you through those tough times trusting that someday, somehow God will rescue you again.

And lastly is the sword of the Spirit. The word of God through which God accomplishes God's powerful cleansing work in our hearts and in our lives.

In this text, Paul was referring to forces of evil that not only lead to the crucifixion of Jesus but now in the first century are doing their darndest to deny and refute the truth of God's victory over the forces of death.

Many had witnessed the risen Christ and have testified to others so that now through the power of God's Holy Spirit that lives in and among them all may come to believe in what God has done for us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and to follow Jesus means to love our neighbor and work toward the restoration of God's kingdom.

And in for the first century church, this was not just a message, but this message was

put into action by the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church where people were united in new ways. All of which threatened the power, the status and the authority of those who for so long had benefitted from the systems that had been set up to exclude and divide.

It was a battle in the first century. A battle that the young church fought and won, as the message of the gospel spread far and wide and has been passed down for generation after generation.

And although Christ has been victorious, and we will always live in the freedom of that victory. The battle with evil and corruption rages on with small conflicts which we experience in our daily interactions with one another. The battle rages on within ourselves with our temptations and desires to be self-centered. And the battle rages on as our anxieties and

fears create doubts that erode our trust in God.

And then there are the larger scary conflicts like those experienced in the first century, where those in power and authority, use that power and authority to subvert the truth of the gospel and the work that God has called us to do.

Paul advises the Ephesians to practice Christian living using these resources that God has given us – truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, justice and the gospel of hope and peace every day in the small battles so that when it is time to suit up and join together with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ we are ready.

Yes, Onward Christian Soldiers, with our orders from God to march fully suited up together to fight the evil and corruption that continues to wreak havoc in our world. The evil and corruptions that continues to use and abuse

people, The evil and corruption that has pitted brother and sister against brother and sister for more than their fair share of the resources. The evil and corruptions that has labeled some of God's children unworthy and unacceptable for being who God has created them to be.

For we, the Church of God, like a mighty army need to not only tread where the saints before us have trod, but we need, the Church of God need to march forward to fight new battles to bring God's people back together again.

And so fully suited up, united in the love of God, the faithfulness of the Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit; we, the Christian soldiers go forward into battle, so that one day God's gospel of peace and restoration will be the reality for all nations.

AMEN

Blessing

May
The love of God,
The light of Christ,
And the joy of the Holy Spirit
Abide with you on this day
and forever more.

AMEN