

Ephesians 6:10-20 August 20th 2015 St James 8 and 10am

What do you see in your mind's eye when we talk about putting on the armour of God? **Wait for answers!**

Do you see the shiny metallic version, like the **men at arms** of yester-year, completely covered in fashioned metal plate with articulated arms and legs and with tiny slits in their heavy helmets to see out of; dragging their huge swords along and lumbering about like malfunctioning robots?

Maybe instead you see the modern British soldier with their bullet proof vests, carbon fibre helmets, protective knee and elbow pads, top quality walking boots and an SA80 rifle; the modern version of the sword.

The technology has changed dramatically, but the point of the soldiers armour hasn't changed much at all. It protects the head and body from attack whilst enabling the soldier to engage in battle, defeat the enemy and return home as unscathed as possible. However, even for the centuries of improvements armour still doesn't offer complete protection.

Today's soldier can run in their body armour, although it is a compromise between agility and protection, whereas the man at arms wasn't very mobile at all and that's probably what did for King Richard III, once he was dismounted from his steed, he had to stand and fight; unable to leave the

field of battle very easily and open to receiving various blows to the head from mace and sword.

It reminds me of the battle between David and Goliath. Goliath was a big fella, but he was weighed down terribly with armour and so encumbered with his weapons that he could only ever stand and thrash it out with an enemy to see who could take more blows than the other man. He was easy meat for David, who could stand at a distance, run about, duck and dive and not even put himself in harm's way of Goliath's huge sword. Shepherds were deadly accurate with their slingshots too. It was no contest really. Instead of the surprising story of the little guy wins over the big guy that we all love to hear, the fact is David was always going to win. Goliath also probably had double vision, so wouldn't have been able to see David unless he stood still in front of him and called out to identify which David was which; allowing Goliath hit him. Hope that doesn't spoil the story for you. We like the underdog to win don't we, sadly the underdog in this case was Goliath.

What do you see when you see a soldier for Christ; a Christian? There's nothing obviously silvery and solid covering them or kaki and bullet proof 'velcroed' around them, but you might see something of their armour. You might note the strength of their faith or their ability to speak the truth or their willingness to share the word, or, you might note how prayerful and relaxed they are... the armour is there, just not as obvious perhaps in

many as it would be if you were clad in iron and clunking about making a terrific din!

And I often think the armour is not always for attack from outside, but from inside too. Maybe the armour should be reversed. Spiritual battles are often internal. St Paul said, **'We do that which we do not want to do and don't do that which we ought to do... and there is no health in us!** He was describing how many things that can harm us spiritually and even physically might be because of what we think or say or do. How many times do we think that a person is their own worst enemy; their actions bringing them much harm or isolation?! What armour might you need to employ stop yourself hurting yourself like this?

Maybe for the Christian, the armour becomes apparent when we take off the outwards signs, our defences, like denial, rationalisation, and intellectualisation. What do I mean by this? Well let me tell you a story of a friend and colleague who - once diagnosed with a terminal illness - thought he could manage, thought he was fine, thought he could ignore the idea of his mortality, but it wasn't until those defences – his armour - were removed that he was able to truly deal with his situation, was able to talk about his mortality and make peace with it. Then he truly had taken up the spiritual armour of God and received the peace that comes with knowing that God is present in Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit and that living fully despite the illness is the best defence there is. Knowing the truth of the gospel, knowing you're saved, and having faith in God's

promises brings the peace of Christ into any situation. The only way to strap this armour on is through a prayerful relationship with God.

He told me of his dream after he was informed of his diagnosis. He dreamt that he was in battle and that his armour had been repeatedly dented and cut and he was battered, bruised and mortally wounded. He suddenly felt completely vulnerable and weakened; the intense grief of his impending loss washing over him in waves. So he took off all his armour plate, and dressed only in his battle dress linen, slumped down with his back against a tree. As he lay there with blood running freely from the deep cuts in his side and head he felt the **deepest, deepest** love of God envelope him like a warm blanket. He woke up from the dream crying tears of joy, wishing the dream didn't have to end and ready to deal with his own illness.

It's not just about our mortality though is it?

The enemy would have us believe that we are not loved, not worthy, not good enough, and not talented; that we don't belong... and that no one wants us around. Those spikey weapons seem to get under even the most snugly fitting armour. How do we fight against those attacks that we might be more able to engage with other people without fear of rejection?

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me... is probably one of the most untruthful things we can say to a developing child.

I find that most of the problems of the world are interpersonal, and the way we deal with other people, talk to, even think about them - which comes out in body language signals - can feel like attacks that need defending against. **Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can break my spirit too.** Where's the love in that?

The reality is that as soon as people gather there is going to be interpersonal dynamics at play, misunderstandings, ego-attacks, noses put out of joint, feelings of rejection, in-crowds that you feel outside of, anger, fear and so on and our dealing with those issues well will be the difference between a church that is healthy, welcoming and unified and a church that is sickly, cold and fragmented. Putting on the armour of God can help us to deal with our own feelings and responses so that we can more readily edify each other, encourage one another and draw closer together with one another for the good of the church and the kingdom.

If it helps you can visualise each day putting on the helmet of salvation; reminding yourself that no matter what happens this day you are saved, so **ha!** You can visualise putting on the breastplate of righteousness which should be a check on your own thoughts and behaviour and keep you on the right path; enhancing your relationships by your own good behaviour.

You can keep your trousers up with the belt of truth by only ever speaking authentically and receiving the respect you deserve for that way of relating and you can deflect the blows of the day with the shield of faith, by

realising that even if other people upset you at times, if you live your faith then nothing can really hurt you, it only matter what God thinks of you, not what others think of you. You can walk in the shoes of peace to carry you lightly into the day; by being loving and kind to everyone you meet and thereby feeling God's love for you even if other people are not loving and kind towards you in return.

And, if all that doesn't keep you safe, you can use the word of God to repel the attack. Maybe even if it is just a word of scripture said under your breath or in your privacy of your mind. If you still feel embattled there is a wealth of God's word to make you feel impervious, safe and loved.

Whatever you face today, tomorrow or in the weeks to come, whether it is an unkind word, a difficult challenge or even your own mortality... if you feel embattled, put on the whole armour of God... and be like David... light of foot, confident and ready to 'fight the good fight with all your might'.

For the glory of God and the growth of the Kingdom.

Amen