

Let me start this morning by offering a somewhat belated “Thanks” to any and all veterans in our midst. I hope that last Friday, the official Veteran’s Day, you all heard many and repeated statements of thanks for your service. It is well deserved, regardless of where you served or what you did. Freedom is not free, and all who have served have uniquely given of themselves for the benefit of their neighbors.

As it turned out, my son Chris and I were asked by Chris’s wife to come to her class of kindergarten kids at Stoneville Elementary School to talk and answer questions that the kids had about Veterans. The impetus for this request was interesting; she had asked the kindergartners what a Veteran was, and most of the answers that she got back indicated that Veterans were people who treated sick dogs and cats – the veterinarians of the world. There is a long history of military service in my family, so Chris (Marine) and I (Army) were invited to try and educate these little ones on what Veterans were, and why they were important enough to warrant a special holiday. Given the constraints that political correctness imposes on those who teach our kids nowadays, I think we acquitted ourselves pretty well. But it was troubling to me that even our very young people were apparently getting little or nothing at home about the importance of the holiday and the people it memorializes.

The Epistle for today from Ephesians deals with another type battle for which there are veterans, in this case religious veterans:

*Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which the is word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel...(Ephesians 6: 14-19).*

It is important for us modern Christians to recognize that there has been a horrific war in heaven and on earth for the last two thousand years of civilization as we have known it, a war of ideas, theology, spirituality and morality. It is the battle for the Bible, the truth, the mind, and the sacred traditions of Christianity. [“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”](#). It was the reality of just this kind of evil spiritual presence, rearing its hideous strength against the early Christians that led St. Paul to advise them to prepare for moral engagement with the enemy. He called for spiritual weapons, using ancient Greek armor as a metaphor. We tend to visualize a different kind of armor from what St. Paul had in mind when he wrote about "God's armor." We hear the word "armor," and we immediately think of the days of chivalry, of men on horseback, dressed in metal suits. But chivalry came into the world hundreds of years after St. Paul's martyrdom, so "knights in shining armor" cannot be the image he is using to teach us about effective Christian living. In fact, we know exactly what kind of armor St. Paul meant. The Greek word he uses for "the whole armor" is "panoply," a technical term for the complete equipment of a particular type of soldier: the Greek hoplite.

The Greek hoplite was a foot soldier, a heavy infantryman, and he was the backbone of the Greek armies in the heyday of Greek civilization. The hoplite was the original "citizen-soldier." The purchase, ownership, and maintenance of his armor and other military equipment were his personal investment in his own freedom. His willingness to fight was exactly what made him a citizen in the first place; and in comparison to the slave soldiers of other nations, he was always advancing, always closing with the enemy, always trying to bring his sword or spear to bear. In many respects, he was a lot like our present day veterans

Now the connection between this sort of soldier and the true, practicing Christian ought to be obvious. God makes us free men and free women by grace, the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven; and he provides us with the whole spiritual armor necessary to fight in his cause. Our persistent, unyielding, united warfare in God's own cause is needed. And we must be ready to fight the world, the flesh, and the devil: to war against apathy, passivity, and disbelief in order to remain free of them. Just as those ancient Greeks fought for their earthly kingdoms, we must

exercise our rights and duties as the citizens-by-grace of the Kingdom of God, if we intend to keep them.

Yet, for far too long Christians in our culture have been naïve, negligent and numb to the reality of what is needed to maintain God's kingdom. They have lived as though they're in a spiritual demilitarized zone. Spiritual warfare means actively working, praying, and struggling together, united in the Body of Christ. We are called to pursue the utter defeat of the devil, not just in our own lives, but in our life together as the Church. We are called by God to be the final protection of every faithful Christian.

On a larger scale, St. Paul intends us to understand that if there is going to be a Christian civilization, it must be founded on the Christian equivalent of the hoplite. We all know that we live in a time of social change and instability, and so our dedication to spiritual warfare in the Name of God must be stronger than ever. Modern spiritual warfare has been less than successful because too many who have called themselves "Christians" have made little effort to bring their thoughts and actions into the obedience of Christ. The Word of God, perfectly and exclusively available in the Bible, is the Constitution of Christianity. It takes little imagination to foresee the fate of an army made up of soldiers who take the field debating the constitution of the country they claim to serve. What is worse, we too often judge our success or failure, whether as human beings or as the Church, by the standards of the world, by the private standards we choose for ourselves. But once we take this position, we are no longer a part of Christ's army. - Tarsitano

The temptations which confront us as modern Christians are, above all, spiritual temptations: the temptation to conform to distortions and dilutions of the truth of the Gospel; the temptation to conform and adapt ourselves to this world's standards of right and wrong; in short, the temptation to conform ourselves to the spiritual darkness which rules the present age. Against such temptations we are poorly armed, unless we take upon ourselves the armour of God's Word, prayerfully and watchfully holding fast to that Word, and helping one another to stand fast: *"watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints."*

Victory is sweet, but victory is always bought at a price, chiefly at the price of doing those duties that go against our natural inclinations. Victory is never free. Just ask those Christian

soldiers, gathered now around the throne of God. They have won their victories over sin and self, giving their lives to God that they might receive them again at his hand, as the perfect, glorious tokens of their spiritual conquest. These Veterans, whom we call "saints," did not achieve a salvation that suited their private needs or wants. They answered God's call to battle on earth, and they stand in victorious fellowship with God, Christ, and other saints forever.

Christian faith and life are never easy - not easy in ancient Ephesus, and not easy now. But I think that we are now facing a time of particularly acute spiritual temptation, as individuals and as a Church. In the last few months and years, our faith has been tested. Our faith is always being tested, but most people in our society can identify with the current plight of the man seeming followed by a storm of trouble. The stock market has convulsed. Weather extremes seem a common and disastrous event. Millions of people can't find work. Our nation along with the rest of the world's economies struggle to achieve stability and growth. Most of us watch all this with more than a twinge of anxiety in our souls. And the collect for today that prays *," to serve God with a quiet mind"*; seems distant.

As we face very challenging times, it is helpful to study the life of David. He was at the point where a huge storm cloud had overcome the young warrior's life. He had been tapped by the prophet Samuel to be the next king. He had conquered a giant. The whole nation adored him, all, that is except the man on the throne, King Saul. The insane king had become literally mad with his own jealousy over David. He had even tried to kill David. As a result, the mighty giant slayer had been driven into exile. While there he writes several psalms (Psalm 29; 57-59). In those psalms he's fond of using an image to describe the calamities befalling him. It is the metaphor of a storm, more like a hurricane or tornado. Trouble comes so fierce that it causes him/us to despair. At the same time, in these psalms David tells us basically two important facts about how to meet the storm clouds when they come.

First, God is bigger than storm. In Psalm 29 David declares, *"The Lord is over the storm; No storm can thwart God."*

It's like something I read a while back:

- Lord, I've never moved a mountain and I guess I never will. All the faith that I could muster wouldn't move a small ant hill. Yet I'll tell you, Lord, I'm grateful for the joy of knowing Thee, and for all the mountain moving down through life You've done for me.
- When I needed some help you lifted me from the depths of great despair. And when burdens, pain and sorrow have been more than I can bear, you have always been my courage to restore life's troubled sea, and to move these little mountains that have looked so big to me.
- Many times when I've had problems and when bills I've had to pay, and the worries and the heartaches just kept mounting every day, Lord, I don't know how you did it. Can't explain the where's or whys. All I know, I've seen these mountains turn to blessings in disguise.
- No, I've never moved a mountain, for my faith is far too small. Yet, I thank you, Lord of Heaven, you have always heard my call. And as long as there are mountains in my life, I'll have no fear, for the mountain-moving Jesus is my strength and always near.

The second point David makes about meeting the storms of life that befall us is to turn to the Lord in prayer and worship. There's no better time to put one's priorities in order than in the midst of a storm of trouble. David prayed and worked his way through the struggles. He prayed in the morning and the evening. In fact, the offices of Morning and Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer are based on David's practice in the psalms. Thomas Cranmer, the one who reformed late Medieval worship into the forms we have in our prayer book, had the vision of a whole nation at prayer. Amazing things can happen when God's people, dare I say an entire nation, prays.

Joe Scriven was a missionary from Ireland to Canada, working among the Iroquois Indians. He was joined by his fiancé who was also from Ireland. Just before the wedding, she was killed in an ice accident. Joe buried her with his own hands, and a broken heart. A year later, in a letter to his mother, he reflected with words that became a powerful hymn.

- "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and grief's to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
- Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged. Take it to the Lord in prayer."

From time to time the storm comes. And yes, the storm will go eventually. In the mean time, keep the faith my friends. God Almighty is bigger than this storm, stronger than our trials. Turn your life of frustration over to Him in prayer. Trust and keep the faith. And thank the Veterans of both the secular and religious wars; it was and is their sacrifice that helps make our prayers possible. ***Amen.***