

**Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH)**  
**Trinity 21 – October 24, 2021**  
**Ephesians 6:10-17, John 4:46-54 – Stand Firm in Christ**  
**By Peter Wagner**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Hear again from the epistle, from Ephesians chapter 6, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” This is our text.

Stand. Stand against the schemes of the devil, schemes to drive you away from faith. “Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.” Stand with the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And when you stand against the spiritual forces of evil waging war against the church, stand not on your own strength. “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.” For your armor is not your own, it is the whole armor of God himself.

Mankind was created to stand before God in his presence. When God created the heavens and the earth in six days, we were his crowning creation. “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them... And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”<sup>1</sup> But when Satan attacked, Adam and Eve did not withstand him. They ate of the fruit, and their eyes were opened. And they could no longer stand before God without shame; they hid themselves from his presence.

Since that day, mankind has always cowered in God’s presence. We cannot stand before God, because we are utterly corrupted by original sin. Our condition is described in 1 Samuel 6, “Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?”<sup>2</sup> Also Nahum 1, “Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.”<sup>3</sup> We cannot stand before God or speak for ourselves. We’re like a defendant in court without an advocate, standing condemned already.

But today’s office hymn is filled with hope. From depths of woe I cry to Thee, crying to God for his forgiveness and mercy. “If Thou rememb’rest ev’ry sin, who then could heaven ever win or stand before Thy presence? Before Thee none can boasting stand, but all must fear Thy strict demand, and live alone by... mercy.”<sup>4</sup>

Because of our condition before God, we’re like the official in today’s gospel, desperate for God’s mercy, pleading Jesus to come down to Capernaum to heal his son. More than we realize, we need God’s Son to come down and rescue us from sin and from its effects. The official was terrified his son would die. He wanted Jesus to come personally, but Jesus wanted to teach him to trust the word of God. So Jesus acted dismissively, testing the official’s faith in order to strengthen it, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” If the official hadn’t trusted God’s mercy, he would have given up and gone away at these dismissive words. But since he did believe, he remained standing before the author of life. He persisted, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”

Jesus did not. He never went down to Capernaum. He stayed where he was and merely spoke the word, “Go; your son will live.” He was teaching that God’s word is powerful to create and sustain life. Genesis 1, “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Psalm 33, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host... He spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.”<sup>5</sup> And by the same word of the Lord, you also believe and receive life.

Today’s readings demonstrate two reasons why God gives us his word. In John’s gospel, one of the two reasons is given: to establish faith. “These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”<sup>6</sup> This is how Jesus used God’s word toward the official. Jesus tested his faith to strengthen it and give life by his word. “The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.” Later, when the man heard that his son started to recover at the very moment Jesus spoke, “he himself believed, and all his household.” Jesus’ words accomplished their purpose, the faith of the whole household was strengthened.

Jesus came to Galilee to restore the dying son to life. That’s a picture of God’s beloved Son, who died and rose to bring us new life. God sent his own Son to be the new Adam, to stand in our place and suffer on our behalf, so we might receive mercy. John 10, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” Jesus came to teach

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:27, 31

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 6:20

<sup>3</sup> Nahum 1:6

<sup>4</sup> LSB 607, From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 33:6, 9

<sup>6</sup> John 20:31

the official to trust his word, and to teach us to trust his word, so that we fallen sons of Adam might inherit eternal life. Romans 5, “Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”<sup>7</sup>

In Ephesians, we find the second reason why God gives us his word, to protect the faith and life that he’s created. His word is our weapon, our sword of the Spirit, to defend against Satan’s attacks. Satan can easily withstand any one of us, but against God’s word he cannot stand. In the garden, Satan attacked mankind by casting doubt on God’s word, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” Eve didn’t repeat God’s words accurately. She added something God had not said, “neither shall you touch it, lest you die.” And Adam failed to correct her; he didn’t speak God’s word at all. So they fell into temptation, and all mankind was condemned.

But when Jesus, the new Adam came, he withstood Satan’s temptation in the wilderness, wielding the sword of the Spirit. He parried Satan’s attacks by quoting Scripture. “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God... Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’”<sup>8</sup>

So Jesus is our example of how to parry Satan’s attacks, and he gives us his word for that purpose. But when we fight Satan, we never fight alone. Spiritual warfare isn’t single-handed combat, just you and the devil. It’s the war of the whole church, the whole army of the living God, with Christ himself in front. In the Greek text of Ephesians 6, all the exhortations to stand and put on the armor of God are plural verbs, not singular. “All of you take up the whole armor of God, that all of you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.” We don’t stand alone as we wrestle against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places – thanks be to God! We stand together as one church, the unified army of saints, with Jesus our captain leading and fighting for us.

As we get ready to celebrate Reformation Day next Sunday, think about *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* – the great Reformation hymn. One of the two versions in our hymnal reads, “Though hordes of devils fill the land, all threat’ning to devour us, we tremble not, unmoved we stand; they cannot overpower us... No strength of ours can match his might – Satan’s might. We would be lost, rejected. But now a champion comes to fight, whom God Himself elected.”<sup>9</sup> That champion is Jesus. He has already won the victory for us over Satan by his death and resurrection.

In the fight with Goliath, David was a picture of Jesus. Alone, each of you would be like David, dwarfed by the enemy. You might try to put on the whole armor of God, but you’d be swimming in it, like David in Saul’s armor, so that he couldn’t even stand. David only overcame the giant because God himself fought for him.

So on your own you’ll surely fall away from the faith, but in Christ and his church, you stand. In the church we find strength through his promised forgiveness. In the church we put on the armor of light, we put on the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup> Last Sunday we heard the parable of the wedding feast, that we are clothed through baptism with the white garment of Christ’s righteousness. Remember Galatians 3:27, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”<sup>11</sup> Now we have another garment image, putting on the breastplate of righteousness, Christ our righteousness. It’s the same thing! Our shoes are the gospel of peace, salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Our shield of faith is the faith we confess in the church – true doctrine – defending us from Satan. True doctrine extinguishes the flaming darts of the evil one because truth always extinguishes lies and expels the father of lies. The helmet of salvation – actually the whole armor – cannot be pierced, because the armor is Jesus, and Jesus was already pierced for your salvation, he has won the victory.

You hear all these things preached and taught in the church, where the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, is wielded to rightly divide Law and Gospel. Here you pray for one another in the Spirit, that he lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. And here you receive the eternal blessings promised to you, blessings of word and sacrament that strengthen you and make you stand again each week. “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”<sup>12</sup> In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Hear this doxology from the book of Jude: “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Romans 5:2

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 4:3-4, 10

<sup>9</sup> LSB 657, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

<sup>10</sup> Romans 13:12-14

<sup>11</sup> Gal 3:27

<sup>12</sup> James 1:12

<sup>13</sup> Jude 1:24-25