

## *What Are You Wearing Today?*

Rev. Nancy Willet  
Ephesians 6: 10-20

August 23, 2009

FPC Uvalde  
Uvalde, TX

I have spoken to schoolteachers before about what a difference it makes when students wear uniforms to school. One teacher commented that she saw a radical transformation in her school when the school uniform policy went into effect. Discipline problems went down and attendance went up once the students started wearing uniforms. So many of the tensions that the students had previously felt because their parents couldn't afford to buy their kids clothes that competed with the other kids, or tensions between boys and girls—all of those just vanished.

Our epistle lesson for today tells us also to dress a certain way—to put on a particular uniform. The writer uses the metaphor of dressing for combat. We are to put on "the whole armor of God;" the "belt of truth," and the "breastplate of righteousness;" "shoes;" the "shield of faith;" and the "helmet of salvation." The image is of a warrior dressing for combat.

In this letter to the Ephesians, the author, before turning to military imagery, however, talks about personal empowerment in relation to Christ. And it is **that**, which sets the focus for this text. It is not the military combat imagery, which controls the Christian agenda, but rather it is the **Christ agenda** that controls this imagery—it is this personal empowerment we enjoy when we have a relationship with Jesus Christ—when we put on the full armor of God.

But surely being a Christian involves more than putting on this "whole armor of God." Is that all there is to it? Dress up on Sunday morning, look like you go to church and people will think that you are religious—that you are a Christian?

Of course being a Christian is more than that. We *are* to dress ourselves in the armor of God, but I don't believe our passage in Ephesians is calling us into conquest—to divide people into those to be loved and those to be hated. Rather, if we want to think in military terms, it identifies the need for resistance.

Note that most of the armament we are to put on is *defensive*, rather than *offensive* in nature. We are to dress for defense, resistance, rather than for launching an attack. This armor is in a sense serves to *disarm* the destructive dynamics that threaten humanity. And those destructive forces are in our midst everyday. Whether you want to call them the devil, or Satan, or human nature gone bad, or whatever—there is the presence of something in our world, which is not God-filled, which is not good, and which can be called evil.

In Matthew 5:39 Jesus said, "Do not resist an evildoer. But, if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other one also." "The word used here for resist is something stronger than simply resist as we think of it. It's do not resist with violence—do not resist violently. Jesus is indicating that we are not to resist evil on its own terms. Don't let your opponent dictate the terms of your opposition.

For instance, if I have a baseball bat and my opponent has a pistol, I am going to have to get a pistol to defend myself—to fight on equal terms, but then my opponent gets a machine gun, so I have to get a machine gun. You end up with a spiral of violence that is unending.

Jesus is trying to break this spiral of violence. Don't resist one who is evil probably means something like, don't turn into the very thing you hate. Don't become what you oppose, says Walter Wink. The earliest translation of this is probably in a version of Romans 12 where Paul says, 'Do not return evil for evil'" ("The Third Way," Walter Wink).

So, we've learned that we are supposed to resist these evil forces in the world in a non-violent way. So how, exactly does this armor of God make us more resistant? How does this armor strengthen our faith so we may lead lives that are able to stand up to evil? When you take away all the metaphors used in this passage, we are supposed to concentrate on truth and righteousness. We are to proclaim the gospel of peace, have faith, remember our salvation and rely on the Word of God. That can be a tall order for most of us.

Maybe this faith and righteousness are something that we must **act** like we have in order to have it. Maybe the way to become a full active Christian *is* to get up on Sunday morning, put on your church clothes, and participate in the rituals of the church, singing the hymns that you are invited to sing, praying the prayers that are printed in your bulletin, then **one** day you may wake up and realize that are you **are** a Christian.

There are really a lot of things that work this way. I've heard marriage counselors tell couples before to **act** like they were in love with each other—to do nice things for each other every day—even when they really weren't feeling that way, and eventually, those would become habits and the true feelings would emerge.

Maybe we make a mistake in thinking the Christian faith has **got** to get deep within us, got to be something that you really feel deeply or deeply understand from within. And I think there are a lot of Christians that *do* have that deep sense of knowing and peace within them. But maybe----this Christian faith is also about something not deep within us, but something external—something on the external of our souls. – Hence the shield of faith.

We've probably all heard someone say that they don't go to church, because the church is full of hypocrites. They don't follow Christ because those Christians they know don't seem to be following Christ.

"Mahatma Gandhi is one of the most respected leaders of modern history. A Hindu, Gandhi nevertheless admired Jesus and often quoted from the Sermon on the Mount. Once when the missionary E. Stanley Jones met with Gandhi he asked him, "Mr. Gandhi, though you quote the words of Christ often, why is that you appear to so adamantly reject becoming his follower?"

Gandhi replied, "Oh, I don't reject your Christ. I love your Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike your Christ." (John Mark Ministries, "Gandhi and Christianity," <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/552.htm>)

Maybe our critics are on to something. Maybe the Christian faith *is* partly external: a set of practices, a way of life, and some predictable motions that you go

through, regardless of your inner disposition. Perhaps you have to act your way into believing before you can actually believe.

Think about it—Jesus didn't say, "close your eyes and think real hard about this—think really deeply about me until you come to that self-awareness and begin to believe in me." No—he simply said, "follow me." Put one foot in front of the other, stumble after me, imitate me, try to walk and live as I do. **ACT** like you are a disciple; **make believe** that these folks beside you are your brothers and sisters. Eventually, it will come to you.

Put on Christ—put on that whole armor of God until Christ gets into you. Don't go out there poorly dressed. If you are going to play football, you need to put on a helmet. If you want to play soccer, you need good soccer shoes and kneepads.

If you are going to be a disciple of Christ, put on faith, dress up in love, clothe yourselves with good intentions, and wrap the promises of God around you. Read the Bible even if you don't understand all of it. Pray, even if you don't feel like it.

Then, after having dressed yourself well for the challenge, go out there and live it. Put on the whole armor of God, and you will become what you profess. You will be that which you desire and what God desires for you. Amen.