

Put on Your Suit of Armour  
A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church  
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The reading from Ephesians 6:14-20 brings us back to what we would think were simpler times. It was supposedly written by the Apostle Paul as he gave the people of the time a grand plan to bring humanity together.

Paul was a visionary – he had been transformed/converted on the road to Cana – he had his suit of armour. And he in his deepest of hearts – even in prison where he wrote these words – hoped he could transform the world one person at a time. Paul was concerned, first of all, with God's plan to bring all creation together, everything in the heavens and on earth with Jesus at the head. Paul had seen a side of humanity that most of us never will, or could ever, want to see.

When I think of suits of armour, I usually think of a trip I made to Germany, where I toured a castle in Nuremburg, where I visited a room filled with suits of armour and weaponry. Now I thought these metal suits were ancient – used centuries ago – but they actually stopped being made only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. And some were even used much later on. The room filled with this protective armour did little to make me feel safe. The suits were huge, awkward, and scary looking but I was fascinated and wondered about the people that wore them and the battles there were in. Even though most of their bodies would have been covered, they were heavy, hot and very, very cumbersome to wear. I wondered if the suits of armour really gave them the protection they needed as they fought in battles.

We remember today, those who fought in battles and wars, family members, like my uncles on my mother's side who all fought in WWII, except for my youngest uncle, both of my grandfathers who fought in WWI, my father who also was on a ship training to go and fight overseas in WWII when luckily the war ended and he got to go home, my mother and her sisters, my aunts who worked in factories making uniforms and packing weapons. Fortunately, my relatives did come back from the war, and my grandmother even received a special plaque to commemorate this fact as most families lost dear family members. I think of the names of our church members on the plaque in the vestibule of our church who fought for our freedom. Lest we forget.

Our office manager Alison provided me with details of her ancestor's activities during these two major wars. The Newfoundland Regiment at Beaumont-Hamel in WWI in March 1916. The regiment was sent to France to take part in the initial phase of the Battle of the Somme. The Newfoundland Regiment was part of the attack's second wave. Initially, it was supposed to advance alongside the 1<sup>st</sup> Essex. However, the Commanding Officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Essex requested a delay to clear their communication trench. The request was granted, and Brigade Headquarters ordered the Newfoundlanders to attack independently. Within thirty minutes of the start of the attack, the Newfoundland Regiment was nearly destroyed. Of approximately 800 soldiers that

left St John's Trench, less than 90 answered the roll call the next day and Alison's grandfather was one of them although because he was wounded, he was send back home Newfoundland. Lest we forget.

In WWII Alison's uncle was a gunner with the Royal Newfoundland Regiment who fought on the front in Germany, Italy, and North Africa near Tripoli. Many of his friends were killed in the war. When he returned home, he said he would never have children because he would never bring a child into such a world. He and Alison's aunt did not have children. Lest we forget.

And Bev's father who was a dear member of our congregation – lest we never forget. Alison and I were reminiscing about our families, and we came to realize that both our fathers were on the same ship, which was preparing to leave Halifax for the war overseas when WWII ended. Both of them might have known each other and both were to be gunners, and both got to leave and go home to their families. Lest we forget.

Did all of these people have the armour they needed? Physical armour maybe, but in most cases not the psychological armour needed.

What is the suit of armour in the Bible?

These pieces are described in Ephesians as follows: loins girt with truth (belt of truth), breastplate of righteousness, shoes with the preparation of the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit/word of God.

So, truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the spirit & word of God.

These are the pieces of armour that the Bible is telling us to wear metaphorically. Symbols to live by. We put on full armour to guard our lives against attack. We put on the belt of truth to protect against lies and deception. We put on the breastplate of righteousness to protect our hearts from the temptations we battle.

In the scripture reading I gravitated to the action of prayer. To set things right us humans need to pray – prayer brings our thoughts into focus and research has even shown that prayer reduces blood pressure and can lengthen a person's life. Gives us clarity. Brings us back into balance. And, it has a positive effect on our lives.

Prayer should be a part of everyday lives – we can pray at any time. Open our hearts and seek the truth, seek the peace that prayer can give us – so prayer can be our suit of armour! How many times have we heard about the power of prayer.

We put on coats and sweaters to keep our bodies warm in the winter. We protect ourselves in the summer with hats and sunscreen. We wear helmets when curling. Always physical things. Our armed forces wear special uniforms and protective gear and not too long ago we put on metal suits of armour.

But we need to protect ourselves from the inside out – to strengthen our heart, our resolve, our sensitivity to all the things coming at us. To improve our relationship with God. And we can do that with prayer.

Do we find it easier to pray when we are by ourselves or in community with our church family. It seems easier sometimes to be in prayer in a church setting – feeling the presence of God. As Jesus said, wherever two or more are gathered I will be there and because Church sets the scene. I think about some of the gospel songs that we used to sing in church. One such favourite of mine is: “The Beautiful Garden of Prayer” – listen to the words of this hymn:

There’s a garden where Jesus is waiting,  
There’s a place that is wondrously fair;  
For it glows with the light of His presence,  
'Tis that beautiful garden of prayer.  
There’s a garden where Jesus is waiting,  
And I go with my burden and care  
Just to learn from His lips words of comfort,  
In the beautiful garden of prayer.  
There’s a garden where Jesus is waiting,  
And He bids you to come meet Him there;  
Just to bow, and receive a new blessing,  
In the beautiful garden of prayer.

The hymn brings forth images of flowers and plants illuminated by the presence of Jesus. A wonderful hymn from 1920 that speaks about the place we need to go in our minds as we pray. As we do not attend church daily personal daily prayer becomes a good habit. And it gets better with practice. The beauty of prayer is that it can be done anywhere and anytime.

It may not seem like much – this praying – it is not tangible – but it works, can offer insight from God and that I why I think church is necessary – it is changing this church of ours, but the basics are there, praying together, making a difference, offering kindness, offering fellowship and hope and support. Church and prayer offer the connection to God that other things lack. It provides us with the suit of armour that gives us the tools with which to put things into action.

Richard Wagamese – an indigenous writer – deceased – wrote a book of readings called *Embers*. It was a book used in a Bible Study I attended a few years ago and is a beautiful book of meditations. So, the book is essentially a book of prayer.

One such meditation: To live in Ceremony is the Greatest and Truest Gift we can give to ourselves: Remember to Remember. This is what Old Man said to me one time. He was speaking of ceremony, of the act of bringing myself closer to Creator, returning myself to innocence, my original power. Remember to Remember. He meant for me, throughout my day, to recall that I’ve taken the time to pray, to give thanks, to ask for a

return to humility. When I do that, everyone and everything I encounter becomes the beneficiary. It is a good teaching as long as I remember.

Richard had the ability and gift to strip away the noise of the day – to pray to God – to communicate and reciprocate.

Today we have a lot of what I call “noise” around us. And it is sometimes very hard to block out the noise, to settle, to quiet our minds, to focus and listen to what God is saying. I think about the noise of humanity – the crying and tears of those who have endured hardships due to the pandemic, the grief of those dealing with the unmarked graves of indigenous children, the noise of people struggling to make ends meet, the noise of the people crying overseas as they leave their homeland. For those suffering from Hurricanes, Tornadoes, Fires and Floods, we can pray for these people. We can pray for humanity. We can pray for Truth, for Righteousness, for Peace, for Faith, for Salvation, for the Spirit, for the Word of God. The world needs more prayer.

I was in a local pharmacy a few weeks ago and I felt a nudge to buy a Sudbury Star; not sure why as I had not purchased a paper for a long time. But when I started to read it later that evening I noticed that there was a section devoted to Sudbury Faith and there was an article written by Rev Mark Smith, who is the husband of a friend of mine and the pastor of the Baptist church on Lansing Avenue. And it was aptly titled, “What do you pray for”. In italics beside the article was the message: Paul is praying that they would know the hope to which they have been called, know the riches of his glorious inheritance and know the immeasurable greatness of God’s power towards those who believe in Christ. The article discussed that prayer is not for getting what we want but focusing on praying for our needs. In essence to grow our knowledge of God – to be in the right relationship with God by praying for it.

As we go through transition, with Doing Discipleship, and with our new minister, Rev. Dr. Linda Marcotte, coming to work and pray with us, my personal prayer is that we stay strong as a church as long as we can, that we use the resources that we have to do good work for humanity, for our families, for our community and when we can for the wider church. That we incorporate more prayer into our lives and know that even though we are a smaller family sized church, that we can make a difference. That we never forget those who have come before us, who fought for us and let us always, always remember that God loves us. Lest we forget.

Amen.