

The Rev. Robert H. Malm  
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The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

### **“Put on the whole armor of God”**

Each of our lessons from scripture today reminds us that we have choices to make every day. Joshua invites us to consider whether or not we will choose to serve God Almighty. His words come at one period in the long history of the Jewish people, a history of choices beginning with Abraham and continuing to Jesus. Some leaders and people make wise, faithful choices. Some make foolish choices.

Today’s Gospel reading from John, Chapter 6, is a continuation from last week. Jesus proclaims, “I am the bread of life...” Many find Jesus’ teaching difficult to understand and to accept. The disciples are given a choice – follow Jesus or turn back. Be nourished by Jesus or not. Jesus even asks the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Peter answers, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life...” Yet we know the other choices Peter makes after Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

St. Paul, near the end of his letter to the Ephesians, encourages his readers to “stand firm.” The struggle in every age is against “the spiritual forces of evil.” Paul had made his choice for Jesus Christ. Paul had gone through his own powerful conversion experience. He had a profound sense of the conflict between good and evil, love and hate, truth and falsehood. He lived under Roman oppression. Paul was arrested, beaten, finally executed. He always chose God’s grace, God’s love, God’s peace.

It may be difficult for us, living in this place at this time, to see the reality of this conflict; to know the necessity of making the right choices. In our baptismal liturgy the candidates and their sponsors are asked to renounce: 1. Satan and the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God; 2. The evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God; and 3. All sinful desires that draw you from the love of God. These are the manifestations of evil that can lead us away from God. These are the choices we are asked to make, not just once at our baptisms, but daily.

Paul gives us some very good practical advice for making the right choices, standing firm in our faith. He writes, “Put on the whole armor of God.” Paul uses the symbolism of a soldier going into battle. I’m reminded of the many years I played football and all the equipment I had to wear: pants with knee and thigh pads, hip pads, shoulder pads, arm pads, helmet, chin strap, mouthpiece. “Under Armour” is now a huge brand started by a former football player hoping to find a shirt he could wear under his pads that wouldn’t get soaked wet from sweat!

For Paul this equipment, this armor begins with truth. Jesus said, “the truth will make you free...” For us, it always begins with truth. “Righteousness” is simply right acting and right thinking based on the truth. Preaching the good news of peace; living this gospel; knowing peace and justice is a choice. Faith and salvation are the results of living in truth and with peace.

Finally, St. Paul's sword (I doubt he ever really had a sword) is the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the equipment, the armor every Christian needs in every age.

It is too easy to lose hope, give up, stop believing in God, live for the self. God gives us enormous freedom, God gives us wonderful choices. God gives us all we need to live in love and in thankfulness; to stand firm.

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18  
Ephesians 6:10-20  
John 6:56-59