

Show Jesus by remaining strong
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Our Savior is Way Lutheran Church

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It is February, and if you had the distinct pleasure of making a New Year's resolution to read more of Scripture, I think that you have done it. We have read an entire book here at church, the book of Ephesians, and made it to the very last chapter, chapter 6, where Paul brings it all together. All the things that we have learned since that first week after New Year's, he puts together here, and in fact, the verse that we theme this around for this very purpose shows up here at the end.

Did you hear that at the end? For this very purpose, Paul sent his messenger to the people to be bearers of this good news for this purpose. What is the purpose? It is to bring the good news to the world. This is why we read a letter that was written to people 2,000 years ago. Because it is still for us.

It is still for us. It is still for you. It is still for the people who are around you. This message of hope and grace through Jesus is real. It is for you. For this very purpose, we are a part of this world and a part of the kingdom of God that is being made known and being accomplished right here in this place.

Now, we talked before about what God's purpose is for us in the first three chapters of Ephesians, and it is all about how God is bringing us back to Himself out of great love for us and His creation. *He is calling His people back to Himself.* And so, when we have a baptism like today, it is an expression of God's incredible love for us, where in this moment He takes this beautiful child and makes her a part of His family. This is a unique thing that has happened in the history of the universe, that God has come to this one singular person, this one creation, and has brought her back to Himself. And this has happened for you as well at your baptism and will keep happening as we keep baptizing people.

This was God's mission for His people from the very beginning. Jesus said, go into all the worlds and make disciples of all nations—everyone—

by baptizing and teaching. This is what we do. We baptize because this is how God brings us back to Himself.

What an incredible thing to witness and be a part of. And we also saw how God's purpose is different from the world's purpose. His power is different than the world's power. Do you remember what His power is? *His power is Hope*. His power is not in swords and shields and, and tanks and missiles. It is not in political persuasion. It is in hope. And I think you know this at your core, that the ways that you have changed in your life most significantly have been because of hope. God brings hope through Jesus tangibly to us. Tangibly through His word, through baptism, through this supper that we have every single week, and through you—through the ways that you share hope with others, you are showing them who Jesus is. And this is exactly where Paul's going because he says there is a battle going on, but it is a different kind of battle than you are used to. Just like God has a different purpose than the world, and a different power, uses a different power than the world does, there is also a different battle that He is fighting.

You see, Paul reminds us that everything that we see, smell, sense, and touch is not all that there is in this world. Here is what he says: *Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might*. Notice that not the strength of your might, not the way that you are able to control and make everything perfect in your world. That is not what is going on here. *Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against authorities, against cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

I had the distinct honor to be able to teach confirmation this week with our middle schoolers. We have our middle school teachers. We love you guys. We are so thankful for the sacrifice you make for all of us. Thank you very much. We love you very much. My wife also would love to be a middle school teacher. It is one of the things that I loved about her the most when we first met, was that she is like, I want to be with these kids. The hope that you can bring into their lives, the way that you can show them who Jesus is by being present with them through all of the craziness that is

happening in their world is incredible. So, what confirmation with all these students and with all the craziness that is happening in their lives, talking to them about miracles. So, what are miracles? Miracles are like Jesus changing water into wine, He makes a blind man see. At their core, they are heaven breaking into earth. They are things of God's kingdom being made real right here in this physical world. And it is a reminder for everybody who sees a miracle, that what we can sense is not all that there is.

What are our five senses? We have sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. This is how we take in information about the world. So, if we cannot do those things, it does not exist, right? That was the question. As we talked a little bit, we mentioned some of these things about miracles. Can this happen? Can we experience things that we do not sense through those five senses? It is a reminder to us all that when we are kind of, when we are surrounded by the everyday things, The things that really, like, our checklists, and the places we have to be, and the things we have to do, our worries and our cares about just life stuff, we get so bogged down and so narrowly focused on the things that are of our five senses.

But there is another world happening right next to that one, one in which the love of God is being shown to you and showered upon you by Jesus in all of these situations. No matter if you are having difficulty with smell, difficulty with touch, difficulty with seeing, God is there with you. He is there. He is present in the middle of that.

And as Paul puts this in this present darkness means that in all these ways that we sense the world, they are all a little bit broken. I do not know about you, but I have now reached the point in my life where when I read, the reading materials go further out this way. And so, I am starting to see how my eyes are failing me even more than they used to.

In more severe things, in our relationships that are really difficult, it seems you used to be this close to someone, and now you are kind of at arm's length. And the difficulties you are having at work with the people that you work with. And the difficulties you are having in trying to figure out what you are supposed to do with your life, and you feel like you should have already had that figured out.

In all of these ways, we experience the brokenness that this present darkness kind of clouds over us. And yet, our God is present with us right there, because He has always been there. He is always there, and He is there to shine light in the midst of that darkness. What we know about Jesus is that He has been raised from the dead.

And when He was raised from the dead, He defeated the power of sin, death, and the power of the devil. All of this, He has been victorious over. So when we sing, *Rise Up*, our eyes are going directly to Easter, that because *Christ is Risen*, oh, you know what to say: *He is risen indeed. Alleluia.*

We will get there in a couple of weeks. It is not Lent yet, but because He has been raised from the dead, you have been given new life. This is what life today is. In the middle of this present darkness, two things are happening at the same time. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world overlap. And we see what we hope to see, the hope that God brings to us, the hope in which He opens our eyes and our hearts is to see that God's kingdom is right here and right now. It is happening right here, right now, in the midst of this present darkness.

So, what do we do? Well, we know first of all that we do not go into this battle alone. We do not. If you have read scripture, you see that as God comes to His people over time, He always goes into battle before them. He is the king. He is the one with the victory to be won, and He wins it for us. So in all these battles that you are going through, know that you are not alone. Know that you are not alone.

Not only is God with you, but we are with you. The people that God has called to surround you with, we are here with you. You are also given some things to go into battle with. And this is one of these great portions of scripture that Sunday school kids learn, and because Paul actually sticks to one metaphor. He talks all about armor, and he uses this great imagery. So, he says, in this battle, in this present darkness, with the victory of Christ upon us, take, therefore, the whole armor of God. And what is this armor supposed to do? It is going to withstand all of this present darkness. And having withstood it all, and at the very end of time, you will stand firm.

And what is that that we are looking forward to? Easter reminds us that someday, Christ will return. And on that day, everything will be made right again. Heaven and earth will come back together again. Everything will be made new. That is the day that we look forward to when God makes everything right again, when everything that was broken as we experience today is healed, when everything that is sad just comes untrue, when God makes everything right again. We hope for that day. We wait for that day.

And until that day, we have armor to put on. So here is what he says. You get a belt of truth, alright? You have a breastplate of righteousness. And having been readied with all those things, you get shoes that bring gospel peace. This is my favorite one, shoes that bring the gospel of peace. So, wherever you go, whatever you are doing, you are called to be a messenger of the peace of the good news of Jesus. It does not matter where you go. It does not matter what you are called to be or to do. You can bring the peace of Jesus wherever you are. This gospel of peace, they are your shoes that take you where God calls you. In all circumstances, take up a shield of faith from which you can extinguish flaming darts of the evil one, and take a helmet of salvation and a sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And this sword is the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit that divides as what is of God and what is not. This sword is the thing that speaks who Jesus is. It is how we understand and see Him, this Word of God. In fact, some would say it is Jesus Himself. In all of these ways, we are given this armor.

Seeing these all together is kind of fun, right? Belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, gospel, peace, faith, salvation, spirit. Do you feel like you are wearing all these today? Is this when you got ready for church today? Is this what you considered when you got ready? What is Paul reminding us? He is saying, look, in this life, in this world in which you have trouble, God has promised to be with you. Not only that, Jesus has overcome all of our troubles. He has been victorious over it. So, what is He going to do? He is going to clothe you with this armor. What does this armor look like? Well, it kind of looks like the same clothes you wore when you were baptized. When God said, "Now today you are mine, and I clothe you with the righteousness of Christ. I have made you white and washed your robes in the blood of the Lamb who has given his life for you. And today you are clean. Today you are pure. Today you are mine. And for all of time, I

will love you.” He gives you this to wear in this present darkness so that you will remain connected with Him and help others see that as the purpose as well. These are not all defensive things. It is not just for you.

This is meant for you to cut through the present darkness, to bring light to others, to show others where hope, the hope that they long for, the hope that they cannot find in all the other ways that they have tried with their career and their relationships, where it just does not fit. It is just not good enough. The hope that they are longing for, you can show them. When you cut through the present darkness with the sword of the Spirit, showing them exactly who Jesus is. Paul finishes as he does every single chapter by refocusing our minds and our hearts on him and the church. So he says this, “Praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication to this end, stay alert. Pray for all the saints, and also pray for me.”

Paul is writing a letter, of course, from one person to a community. He reminds them that this hope which is the power of God is wielded by the church. Now, I do not mean that as an institution kind of thing. Because you are the church, the people of God. Wherever they are and wherever they exist is the church. And through you, God is making His hope known to the world. Remember those shoes that you wear? Shoes of the gospel, peace, of good news? You are bringing that to the people around you when you help them reconnect with the Savior who loves them so very much.

Paul finishes by reminding them that this mystery of the gospel is not a mystery to us anymore. It still is to the world, to those who still think that the darkness is all that there is. But we are called to declare this mystery revealed in Jesus alone. May we declare this boldly everywhere we go, reminded that we are not fighting against powers and principalities in this physical world. We are bringing hope to people that they might turn and see that God loves them. Through Jesus, He has saved them and done everything necessary to bring them back to Himself, and this is for them. Not for some other people, not for once I kind of get my life together people, but it is for you, right where you are. This is a hope in Jesus for you that changes your life.

So what is God’s purpose? It is to bring us back to Himself out of *Love*. He works through His church to bring this to people through *Hope*. That

is where His *Power* is. And He gives us everything that we need in this present darkness to make that happen, to protect us, for sure, reminding us that Jesus has already won the victory, giving us this incredible suit of armor that allows us to remember that we are His, and to carry that into our lives wherever we are. For this purpose, Paul wrote this letter to Ephesians some 2000 years ago. And to you today that you might see that God loves you, that He is with you in the midst of all the brokenness that is happening now, and in Jesus, He gives you victory over all of it, so that you might share this with others, bringing them hope as well, calling them back and bringing them back to their Heavenly Father.

I pray this for you as we finish this series, that hopefully as we have read through this letter, that you have seen in your life ways to apply this, ways to see this happen, whether it is in your mind or in your heart, or whether it is in your relationships and the way that you look at your work, or especially as you look at your relationships with the people that you share the sanctuary with, you might see that we are here together for one purpose, to bring hope to the world. I pray that we gather together in that each and every day, especially in this upcoming season leading up to Easter, helping people around us experience this incredible love of God that has changed our lives so much.

Let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you for being with us today, for leading us and guiding us to this place, with these people, to hear your message, that you desire us to return to you. That, out of great love for us, you sent your son Jesus to die and to rise again, that we might be given life.

That in our baptisms, you have given us this life, and you call us each and every day to live out that life, in this present darkness, as people of the light. Allow us to focus on Jesus each and every day, and with his grace and mercy, share that with the people around us, so that they, too, might join us in this thing called church.

Lord, for each and every person here, we ask that you give grace and peace. Allow them opportunities this week to share your grace with those around them, and remind them that you love them each and every day.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.