

St Andrew's on The Terrace Sunday 26 August 2018 Pentecost 14. Being Christian: suiting up for the Inner Journey

Readings for the Gathering

Epistle

The Armour of God

Ephesians 6:10-17

10 Finally, be strong in God and in God's mighty power. 11. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against evil schemes. 12. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

13 Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which contains the word of God.

The Gospel

Jesus before Pilate

John 18: 33-40

33 Pilate then summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" 34 "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" 35 "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied.

"Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" 36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." 37 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." 38 "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. 39 But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release the king of the Jews?" 40 They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

Contemporary Reading

The Rev. Christopher McLaren, 21 November 2010

<http://www.all-angels.com/sermons1/sermon-the-rev-christopher-mclaren-november-21>

How is Christ the king? In love, in forgiving, in showing mercy. How is Christ King? In teaching us to face our fears, to acknowledge our needs, and to accept the generous grace of God filling us up everyday if we are willing to empty ourselves. How is Christ king? In the unexpected way of a suffering servant, through humility not entitlement. Christ is enthroned, but not in kingly raiment with the accoutrements of power. Christ is enthroned in the everyday love and service of humanity. Christ the king is found among the wounded and the lost. Christ the king is standing in the unemployment line. Christ is king in the father struggling to control his anger with his children.

Christ the king is in the businessman wrestling with being honest instead of making a killing. Christ the king is in the woman finding her strength to lead in a man's world with compassion and vision and toughness. Christ the king is reigning everywhere, everywhere the human heart is willing to be filled by the abundance of his grace. Christ plays in 10,000 places.

The fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Jesus of Nazareth that we too might know the fullness of God in our very lives, not as some fanciful idea but as the life-giving grace of relationship with God that can transform us into people whose lives are shaped by the cross, made cruciform by the stories and life and love of God in Christ. Christ is king when the love and sacrifice and self-giving of the cross invades your life and mine.

This sermon for Christ the King Sunday was preached in St Michael and All Angels Episcopal church, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The Reflection

In a former time, the concept of suiting up and putting on the whole armour of God fitted with the view Christians held of God and the world and the cosmic battle being played out between good and evil. It is a theme upon which many sci fi movies are based today and Star Wars has that theme of the good vanquishing the evil warriors of the world. Some of you will remember that it also made a good Sunday school lesson because there were all those elements to learn – that belt of truth around your waist. The breastplate of righteousness – doesn't that have a grand ring to it! Feet fitted ready with the gospel of peace (ironically since we are suiting up in full battle armour). Then the shield of faith and I always loved the rolling words of this phrase "with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one". Pow! Pow! – would make a good graphic novel. Finally, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. It not only made you the young Christian feel less vulnerable, it also gave you a nasty picture of the world. First it was definitely a world out there, where this spiritual evil resided and secondly it was nasty. You needed this exoskeleton of armour to keep safe and to fight the good fight.

After talking last week about the wisdom of looking within rather than focusing on without, I wondered about the concept of an exoskeleton for our armour if our journey was in fact an inward one. I also wondered what Jesus did about donning any sort of armour. The moment when Jesus fronts up face to face with opposition is this moment with Pilate. A few years ago a youth group has the experience of sitting in Pilate's chair looking down at Jesus and pondering the moment. One bright young man said to me he had liked that bit best. When asked why she said because of the power. I remember than now. Jesus stands toe to toe with temporal power here, so how is he suited up for the

moment? As we know, he doesn't seem to have suited up at all. He is simply there. Not beaten up as yet, much, thought probably tired after a sleepless night with no less than three illegal trials during it and being pulled from one official residence to another. Jesus come armoured with a complete knowledge of who he is. He knows he is a king, though the type of king he is he also knows is different from the type Pilate is expecting. He knows his true home, his real address. It is in the inner domain not the outer-worldly Roman Empire territory. He cannot produce a street address or rapid transit number. He does bring truth with him and since a girdle is probably the only item of clothing he wears with his robe the belt of truth seems to fit here. He also seems to come with a serenity and confidence we might envy.

So I pondered some more on what the so-called whole armour of God would look like if it was armour created for an inner journey rather than an external battle.

The piece from Christopher McLaren caught my eye as he has gone one step on from the triumphal warrior king image and reinterpreted kingliness in terms of love, forgiving, showing mercy, teaching us to face our fears, to acknowledge our needs, and to accept the generous grace. He links kingliness with suffering, with service with humility and not entitlement. He links an enthroned Christ with the everyday love and service of humanity found among the wounded and the lost, standing in the unemployment line, in a father struggling to control his anger with his children. He links Christ's royal authority with honest business, with women finding strength to lead in a man's world with compassion and vision and toughness and with abundance of grace.

These are the kinds of garments and equipment which our inner journeys will require of us. Our inner journeys which circle round, up and down, back on themselves and curve to the left and the right like a labyrinth. They are journeys which cannot be rushed but need to be savoured and paid careful attention. I know, you know that good things take time and developing our inner ability to pay attention and remain present in the moment is a lengthy task. The painting on the front of the order of service is from Jan Richardson's body of work. Her website is an interesting read. On the labyrinth she has painted she has written excerpts from St Catherine of Sienna. Catherine is an interesting saint. She lived much of her religious life at home and later was drawn more and more into an active and political life as an expression of her inner journey. Her written work became so influential that she was later declared a Doctor of the Church, a title mostly reserved for academically trained men.

Her words painted into the labyrinth by Jan are reprinted under the title of the reflection in the order of service. Some of the words within that saying give us a clue as to the armour needed for an inner journey. Catherine writes about: nourishment, made for love and living only by love. She writes about true knowledge of oneself. She writes about being nurtured in humility and true discernment. And towards the end there is this phrase the fragrance of glory. It reminds me of the phrase at the end of Jim Cotter's Jesus prayer about reigning in the glory of the power that is love. Perhaps Catherine here is writing about the fragrance of the glory of the power which is love.

Suiting up for the inner journey is a different kind of preparation for life. It involves quite a different type of armour.

These different concepts allow us to fight a completely different kind of battle by giving us a whole quiver full of different resources that come out of a completely different world view from the imperial attaining of peace through victory in vanquishing others.

We could put together Jesus' words to Pilate "my kingdom is not of this world" and his words in John's Gospel 14: 27 "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."