7-11/12-20 Armor Up with Justice Rev. Amy Haines

1 Samuel 17:1-50 Armor Up Series

Though troubles linger still/ Whom shall I fear

I know who goes before me/ I know who stands behind

The God of angel armies/ Is always by my side

-Chris Tomlin, “Whom Shall I Fear (God of Angel Armies)” lyrics

What am appropriate song Mary chose to sing today! What a word from God we need to hear today! God is with us! Whom shall we fear? Though troubles are all around us. We know that God is always by our side.

This summer, we are reflecting on the stories of our faith ancestors that encourage us and remind us that God is indeed with us and has equipped us to face the challenges of each day.

This summer, we are reflecting on the armor of God described in Ephesians 6, God’s qualities and characteristics that guide us to stand strong in the strength of the Lord against all that surrounds us.

Ephesians 6 proclaims: -Eph 6:14-17 CEB

“Stand with the belt of truth around your waist,

justice as your breastplate,

and put shoes on your feet so that

you are ready to spread the good news of peace.

Above all, carry the shield of faith so that

you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word.”

Today, a familiar story of David encourages us

to put on justice as our breastplate,

to cover our heart with the righteousness of God.

Our Scripture from 1 Samuel comes from the time when the 12 tribes of Israel were united under King Saul, yet struggling not to be conquered by the Philistines. Saul’s faith and courage were weakening, and no one in Israel wanted to fight the mighty Philistine warrior named Goliath. For forty days Goliath taunted Saul and the Israelites, and for forty days they cowered in fear.

Listen to the description of Goliath in 1 Samuel 17: 1-11…

Have you ever been so afraid of something that you were unable to move, unable to think clearly or act clearly? That was the situation for the Saul and the Israelites as they cowered in fear, unable to move against Goliath.

Today some people are unable to go camping, so fearful they are of spiders and snakes. Other people are unable to drive in the city, fearing the traffic. Some people are paralyzed by fear from speaking in public or praying out loud, even in a small group.

The legendary Knute Rockne knew the power of fear and once used it to good advantage to psych out his opponent. Notre Dame was facing a very critical football game against the vastly superior University of Southern California. So Rockne recruited every big, brawny, bulky student he could find at Notre Dame. He suited up about a hundred of these "HULKS" in the school uniform. On the day of the game the USC team ran out on the field first and awaited the visiting Fighting Irish. Then, out of the dressing room came an army of green giants who kept on coming and coming and coming. The USC team panicked. Their coach reminded them that Rockne could only play eleven men at a time, but the damage had been done. USC lost that day. They didn't lose to the hundred men, Rockne didn't play any of them. They were beaten by their own fear.

-from A. Philip Parham, LETTING GOD, (New York: Harper & Row).

Quoted by Rev. Billy D. Strayhorn, www.epulpit.net

Like a child paralyzed by fear of the playground bully, Saul and the Israelites were paralyzed by fear of the giant Goliath.

Then along comes a boy named David. David hails from the small town of Bethlehem, and is the youngest of Jesse’s eight sons. His primary responsibility at this time is to care for his father’s sheep. What Saul and the rest of Israel does not yet know, is that the prophet Samuel has already secretly anointed David to be their next king, chosen by God. As David is still somewhere between 10-15 years old at this time, I imagine he really doesn’t yet comprehend the impact of that anointing.

In today’s story David is simply being obedient to his father, going back and forth between caring for his father’s sheep to delivering food to his three oldest brothers who were serving in Saul’s army.

While visiting the camp, David heard the taunt of Goliath, and struggled to understand the paralyzing fear of the Israelites.

We continue David’s story in 1 Samuel 17, skipping ahead to verses 20-30.

David was upset that no one would fight the Philistine fighter. David was more upset that no one would stand up to defend the army of the living God.

David then volunteered to be the one to fight Goliath. Logically, this is an absurd request.

Send a kid to fight a giant? How ill-matched would that fight be? To most people’s ears, including Saul’s, David’s request sounded like a suicide mission.

Imagine the scene as young David and King Saul meet, in verses 31-37…

Are we ever that confident when facing the giants, the bullies, the goliaths in our lives?

Think about the Goliaths we face in life today:

COVID, racism, apathy, economic instability,

anxiety, abuse, depression, neglect,

materialism, irrelevancy, decline, hopelessness.

How often do our goliaths paralyze us as much as they paralyzed Saul and the Israelites?

How often do we become so overwhelmed with the problems in our lives, in our churches and in our world that we retreat, we give up, we give in?

We wonder if there is any way to make a difference, to have purpose and meaning, to be relevant in a world seeking to believe in something but not seeking to believe in Jesus.

The goliaths in our lives aim their barbs at our hearts, tempting us to give into fear, tempting us to remain silent, tempting us to doubt God’s righteousness.

While we may not have the confidence of David, we can live into the faith of David. David trusted in God’s strength, God’s presence, God’s faithfulness. We are also called to trust in God with us, giving us the courage to step out in faith, the courage to speak out in love, the courage to seek out God’s ways.

David was not concerned with whatever he would face, bear or lion or giant. He trusted that God was with him. He trusted in God’s armor, not man’s armor.

David may not look like a warrior, but he had the one weapon Saul no longer had—complete trust, faith and confidence in the Lord God.

As Pastor Bob Deffinbaugh puts it:

“In the end, it is not so much that David is great, but that the God he serves, the God who went before him, is great. Saul seems to focus on the size of the enemy rather than on the size of God. God always seems to give us enemies who are much greater than we are, so that we fight in our weakness, trusting in God and not in ourselves, giving Him the glory, rather than taking the credit ourselves.”

-Bob Deffinbaugh, bible.org

Whereas Saul had forgotten who and whose he was, forgotten his people’s history, resources, and yes, even their God, David trusted in a God who is bigger than any giant, bigger than any obstacle, bigger than any doubt. David trusted that when he faced Goliath, he did not face the giant alone. God was with him.

The battle is described in verses 38-50…

David couldn’t yet wear the armor of a king. He was not yet a warrior in that right. But he was a shepherd boy who had learned to aim and kill with a slingshot and a stone. And that is what he did. More importantly, however, David faced Goliath with the strength of his faith.

When we face our goliaths, we need to remember that God will equip us with what is needed for the battles in our lives. God equips us with the armor of God mentioned in Ephesians 6, ways to live to stand firm in faith. God equips us with God’s own word through the Scriptures in which we know the truth of God and of our salvation. God equips us with the knowledge to follow the call of Micah 6:8: “to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.”

The choice is ours whether we will utilize what God equips us with, whether we will put on the ways of God, in order to guard our hearts with the strength of the Lord.

Today we are called to live by God’s righteousness, with a breastplate of justice.

Like David, we are called to trust in God’s faithfulness.

Through Christ, we are called to claim a right relationship with God as God has forgiven us and restored us.

Now, as Christ’s followers, we are called to guard our hearts in order to live by God’s ways in all of our relationships, to live by God’s care for others, to live by God’s restorative justice.

We won’t become warriors for God overnight. Our Christian faith is a process.

As Martin Luther once said:

This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing,

not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.

-thepastorsworkshop.com: sermon quotes righteousness

Friends, it is time to armor up—with God’s belt of truth.

It is time to armor up—with the breastplate of justice.

And next week, it will be time to armor up—with shoes ready to proclaim peace.

Go stand firm in faith and the strength of God’s power.

May it be so. Amen.