



TOUCH POINT

War No More – Touchpoint for August 21, 2024

John 6:56-58 (NRSVUE) The Bread from Heaven

⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which the ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

Ephesians 6:10-20 (NRSVUE) The Whole Armor of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power; ¹¹ put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, ¹² for our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on the evil day and, having prevailed against everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand, therefore, and belt your waist with truth and put on the breastplate of righteousness ¹⁵ and lace up your sandals in preparation for the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, so that when I speak a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Grace and peace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

Who or what is this enemy Paul is speaking of? Shouldn't we know before we start walking around in public looking ridiculous, pivoting in all directions, waiting for attacks seen and unseen? One translation describes them as principalities.

Principality is defined as a territory, country or domain. A domain. Hmm... are you thinking what I'm thinking? Applied to our present culture, perhaps it includes a website or social media as domain? Which one dominates you and me?

What's this about armor as the outfits of war? Did Paul forget that he said the joy of the Lord is our strength, that it is Christ in me that strengthens me?

The passage says, 'Take the sword of the Spirit.' There it is! There is where I can do battle with the strength of my gym routine and testosterone supplements! Put on the whole armor of God... which is the Word of God. No wonder I was taught in my hippie Christian days that the Bible is the sword I should swing hard in battle!

Paul says we don't war against enemies of flesh and blood, but against rulers and authorities. Isn't that a contradiction? Aren't rulers and authorities made of flesh and blood? Yes, that's why we do not struggle against our fellow human beings. Just as we don't struggle with our bodies as enemies, but struggle against the lies, deceptions and counter claims to the flesh and blood identity declared in Christ. Maybe it's anything that we give permission to dominate our hearts and minds that is the enemy. Just like idols and icons. It is not porcelain figures, paintings, and pop stars we worship, but a projected image we create that we worship.

What dominates us? Since I am speaking to a church audience, is it maybe Christian-based ego at times? Or is it perhaps Pride, Greed, Sloth, Hatred, Envy that wants to have the final say on our lives?

Maybe it would be better if we pause a bit before attaching “spiritual warfare” to outside sources and see what illusions we’ve allowed to dominate our minds and souls: a political party, an ideology, a theology, an economic structure, an irrational fear, or principality.

I don’t know what to do with this spiritual warfare thing if it is a battle outside of myself. I have friends who are all about spiritual warfare. The clash is usually described to be against schools pushing diversity, equality, and perceived liberalism. It’s a battle to determine who is Christian and what leader will usher Christian control over decision making. These friends are angry at the rise of the devil in culture, named Woke. One day it’s prayer in schools, the next, freedom to refuse service to LGBTQ patrons.

The Bible is their Peter sword, scriptures are sent like fiery darts. Maybe if we hold these “spiritual battles” up to the light we will see this is not armor for the battle, but weapons of destruction?

Ephesians 5:14

For anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says,

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Or *Isaiah 52:1*

Awake, awake,
put on your strength, O Zion;
put on your beautiful garments,
O Jerusalem, the holy city;
for there shall no more come into you
the uncircumcised and the unclean.

Aren’t these evangelicals the same people that have said the battle has already been won because of Christ? The last guy that tried to defend Jesus, Jesus called Satan and told him to get behind him. Ouch!

Why are we doing spiritual warfare? Because the world doesn’t accept our American version of Jesus?

In Calcutta, Mother Teresa celebrated Shawwal with her Muslim neighbors because as she said, “I see the Jesus I love, in them.” We struggle not against their flesh and blood, why? Because we can see the flesh and blood of Christ in all people. Was her armor perhaps the sandals of Peace? Maybe her battle was with the American Christian businessmen who questioned her that day for loving them. They wanted to donate money but were perplexed about why she loved who they thought were enemies. And she appeared to do it without an agenda of conversion.

Maybe the real battle for the armor of God is in our own house. Like in a movie thriller, the terrorizing voice reveals on the third call that he’s calling from within the house.

We war not against flesh and blood but nations, domains, authoritarians, voices, threats, and lies who have no power unless we drop the armor of God and allow dominance.

What we may need to do is eat the bread and drink the cup that nourishes us inside. If it weren’t so, we would obsess over changing cultures in other countries, carry signs to demand allegiance and wield flags as weapons. And we would never do that, would we?

We war not against flesh and blood. In John, we are once again talking about Jesus' flesh as bread. Perhaps we nurture the truth within us with the Bread of Life. It's a declaration of our freedom so true that we recognize we cannot do battle with it. It is the Lord's battle. The word or the declaration is the same declaration that Jesus received in the River Jordan. "This is my son in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus had done nothing yet to earn it and did not struggle to preserve it. He did not defend it, and he did not negotiate it. It was his declared identity and so it is with us, even before we are ever baptized. The water is a conscious refresher of the identity we always had. The water awakens us to a woke state! So as a proudly woke man, I am impervious to the authorities defining me, unconcerned with the Chicken Littles crying about God not being allowed in schools, unmoved by protests to ban books, and the fights to return to archaic patriarchal ways to preserve Christianity. The way I see it, to listen and allow the voices to penetrate and define me is to operate without the whole armor of God.

Maybe we need to remember the baptism of the one we claim to follow. His identity was declared, not earned, and he did not defend it, he lived it. He shared it. We are all children of God regardless of belief, creed, color, gender, denomination, denier, betrayer, hater, lover, Christian or non-Christian. Perhaps we don't need to defend it. We need to live it.

When we eat from this Bread of Life, we feed this inner truth and longing for connection. When an assault comes, we put on the whole armor that belongs to God, not us... no weapons, just armor. Because the kingdom of the heart is healthy enough to stand.

So maybe spiritual warfare people have it wrong about these passages. Perhaps the purpose of the whole armor of God isn't to engage in warfare. Could it be that our hearts, minds, and souls are too precious to subject them to external illusions of power and dominion? We are to be led by the Spirit that resides deep within us.

When the temptations come, we may want to draw the sword of warfare, but let's remember the words Jesus said to Peter when he struck the soldier who threatened Jesus: "Put your sword away, shall I not drink the cup?"

Our sword is not the weapon of warfare, but the Word of God which declares us to be people of peace, with armor used to protect our inner truth and protect ourselves from embarking on an unfortunate spiritual insurrection... and doing it in the name of Jesus.

Psalm 84:8-12

8 Behold our defender, O God; and look upon the face of your Anointed.

9 For one day in your courts is better than a thousand in my own room, *
and to stand at the threshold of the house of my God
than to dwell in the tents of the wicked.

10 For the Lord God is both sun and shield; he will give grace and glory;

11 No good thing will the Lord withhold from those who walk with integrity.

12 O Lord of hosts, happy are they who put their trust in you!

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

Hearken to My Voice

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Hearken to my voice, O Lord when I call. Have mercy on me and answer me.
You speak in my heart, and say, "Seek my face". Your face, Lord will I seek.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come, O Lord, and Set Us Free

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Come, O Lord and set us free. Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother

Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

A Blessing

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd. Complete Chants Vol.1)

May the Lord bless you.

May the Lord protect you and guide you.

May His strength uphold you. His light shine upon you.

His peace surround you. His love enfold you.

May the Lord bless you.