

Calvary United Methodist Church
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FINDING STRENGTH
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

Ephesians 6:13

I'd like the children to come forward at this time for our children's message. Welcome everybody! Good to have you here.

I'm going to be telling a little story in a bit about a Roman soldier and how he was prepared. Do you like getting prepared for things? What kind of things do you prepare for? (Baseball.) Baseball. What do you do? (Practice.) You practice and practice and practice to get the best, right? What other things do you practice for, get prepared for? Any ideas?

When I was younger I was a Boy Scout, actually I'm an Eagle Scout, and one of the things we were taught was to prepare for what might come. You had to prepare, for instance, in a few weeks it might get cold, mightn't it, as winter approaches, and do you do something to help prepare for that? Nothing? Would you dress like you for today for a winter storm? (Child speaks.) You might. You might be pretty cold if you are out there very long.

Bring prepared is a very good thing to do. It's making ready beforehand, you get ready. And I'm sure some of you are already doing this if you are at school. How many of you had spelling tests this week? Anyone? Did you get some spelling words? I remember those days; you get 10 or 20 word and every couple days or once a week anyway you would have to learn like how to spell cat: K-A-T. Oh, C sounds like a K sometimes, right, but that's not how it's spelled. And if you took those words home and your moms or dads or brothers or sisters or friends practiced with you, you would have a good time. There are fun ways to play, make games out of learning those words, right? And if you studied real well you got 20 out of 20, or 10 out of 10. If you didn't prepare by studying, what would happen? Ever have one of these days? You get a paper back and you have like 2 out of 20. Is that a good thing?

See, if you want to pass your subjects in school, if you want to be ready for winter or if you are going to do other things you have to prepare, because if you don't prepare there's trouble.

How many of you ride bikes, tricycles, bicycles, any kind of cycles, unicycles? Some of you do it. Now if you would see a sign like this, what would that mean? Be prepared to stop. What might be the problem, if you didn't obey the sign what would happen? Well, you might be run over if it is crowd section or what if there was a hole like this? Your bike would just go right down into the hole.

See, there are a lot of reasons why we prepare for things in our days. If you want to be a great musician you have to practice. If you want to be a good athlete you have to practice. You have

to prepare...how many of you like to bake or cook? Some of you? You are just all eaters? You know, somebody has to do the work. So, anyway, if you like to prepare for baking, say you want to make some kind of a cake or something like this, guess what happens if you want to make a peach cobbler or a peach crisp or something and you forgot eggs or the flour or the peaches. Would it turn out very good? (No.) No! Before you start cooking or before you start baking, or before you start doing anything that you want to do, you can't go bike riding if you don't say, "Is my bike ready to ride? Do I have a flat tire?" You check things out. You get prepared for the things so you can get what you want. If you want a final product, you have to get what you want.

There is a scripture today, it says: Therefore, put on the full armor 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. Be prepared.

You see, the full armor of God, someone would have this helmet on...I'm not sure about this. Do I look good? You have to be honest. It is to protect our minds. You see, on this photo up here there are all kinds of things: the helmet of salvation. What goes into your mind? You have to be positive, you have to be loving, you have to be liked. There is a best of truth. Do we ever tell lies? No...we try to be truthful in the things we do and we don't make up stories that shouldn't be made up. It's the breastplate of righteousness. We protect our heart and our chest. If you were going into battle and someone got your heart you are going to have problems, so we protect it and we protect it by knowing God as our friend, by praying to God, by learning about God, by readying about God, by spending time in fellowship. The more times we grow in God, we are protected by an armor. It is the spirit of truth and these shoes, the sandals they have on were to take them fast into battle. Our shoes take us into the world that you might show love to other people.

You see what we have here is nice for us, that we love one another, but it is better in the world: the people out there need to know that we love them, that we care about them, that we'll help them.

So, this whole suit of armor that the scripture talks about is preparing it and when we get ready for anything, we plan first. If you are going to do a day outing or going to go to baseball or going to bake or cook or study spelling, you plan. Then you prepare and then you have to go and take the spelling test, ride the bike, bake the cake. You have to do whatever it is. Those are all characteristics of what it means to be a Christian that we prepare ourself, we come to worship and we learn about God. That's preparing and we make a plan that we are going to go and love other people the way that God has loved us. That's what it means to be a Christian, to share God's love.

So, I hope as you go to school, as you go home, as you are with friends, you remember that you always have the armor of God to protect you. God is with you all the time. Do you know that? How often? All, all the time. It's a good thing to remember that God is with us.

Thank you for coming up this morning. Have a wonderful week!

Message:

Ephesians 6:10-20

Let's pause for a moment of prayer: Almighty and Everlasting Father, we thank you for the Word that comes to us through the Apostle Paul. We thank you that your word is always unto our path. We pray today that the words of my heart and the meditation will be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord. Amen

Paul, who you have been hearing from for about the last six or eight weeks, has spent a lot of time speaking to the early church. He was trying to convince these young followers of Christ of the importance of having unity among them, speaking with one mind and leading others on the path of life. Being an early disciple had to be confusing because they were used to rules and regulations and "Thou shalt not dos..." and all that and when Christ came it was "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and your mind and love your neighbor as self." It became a more simplistic rule, that God wanted his children to know love. And He knew these people had to make a choice, there is a path every day and the path is still not only for the early disciples, it's our path. Every day you can choose: I'm going to keep trying to follow God even if I stumble, I am going to stay on this path. Or you can choose the other one, which is the path of our own way.

I don't know about your life journey, when I do my own way, it doesn't always work out so well. It didn't work out well when I was a little boy and my mom and dad didn't like my path sometimes. It didn't work out when I made some adult decisions that weren't made in good prayerful thought. Staying on God's road even when we stumble and fall, we can pick ourselves up and begin.

The idea that we're unity, that we become one body, we don't always agree on everything, but we can respect, we can honor and we can find in every situation some kind of redemption that shows the world around us that we are united. It's when we as the Body of Christ are split in so many directions, those on the outside of the world looking in see us and say: I don't know what these people believe. They don't live it. They are so confused. It's really not what I hear about Jesus Christ as being.

You see, we have a purpose. The sole purpose for every Christian is to bring the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth that those around us would see peace and mercy and love and all those other things that fall in place like the respect and honoring one another.

You know, the idea of being in the Eternal Kingdom of Heaven when we pass is a place of eternal peace. We can have that now. Now, that peace is broken up once in a while when we have destructive things, losses and tearful things, events in our lives, but we still find a peace to know that when I'm living with God and I'm living for God I'm right where I need to be.

Every time I think about being cleaned up by Jesus Christ in the baptism I'm reminded that not just today but every day is a new day, so my script that went bad today, something terrible happened, I didn't do right, I sinned, fell short, the brokenness of life, I'm reminded that, you know what, Jeff? Tomorrow is another day.

Tomorrow God gives you this day and there are these words that came from Albert Schweitzer: There can be no Kingdom of God in the world without the Kingdom of God in our hearts. It's not said any clearer. How can the world around me change if I look like the world?

Of all the things Christians are called to be is to stand apart. We often hear that about the Amish: Do not be of the world. But that is all of us. When people look at us, we shouldn't treat others the way that others treat the world. We should be filled with mercy and grace and love and forgiveness. You see, it's not easy to do those things. Or otherwise, when Jesus was slapped he wouldn't have said, "Turn the other cheek," he would have slapped the people. But he didn't, did he? When they came mocking him and making fun and beating him and whipping him and those things, he reminded us that we dare not be like that. We must love in spite of what other people do to us. Being a disciple of Christ lets us know one thing: We already have a victory. We don't have to be in fights with people. Even when others are against us, we know that Christ won the victory on that cross.

Some of you are big sports fans and I don't know any sports fan that wants their team to lose, right? As a Christian, I don't want to lose. I want us to be reminded that we stand strong in God. The price was paid on the cross. We are already victors. Jesus paid the price for our redemption day after day after day. And what's better news is, and I know you know this, every one of us in this room already has what it takes to be the child of God we are called to do. We just have to think about it.

My parents had to tell me this a lot: you need to think before you act. Did you ever hear that? Did you ever hear also: think before you speak? I'm not so good at those things yet, but I'm trying because you and I have what it takes to be a Christian that would honor God in all things.

One of the things I see when I pick up the news in the morning or I turn on the internet and you see what's going on: this world has a lot of darkness. You can't escape it. From what's going on with someone threatening nuclear powers and governments threatening one another and people and neighbors threatening and some of the things we see in the news are so dark you can't even believe that people do some of these things.

That is the world of which we live and God says this to us so we have Good News: I'm bigger than that. Do you know that? Our God is bigger than the darkness of the world and God is greater than any problem you and I can face. Can I hear an "Amen?" (Amen.) You are strong, I like that. It doesn't matter. We face death and it hurts and we cry and we are broken and we know that we are already redeemed by God and we will be with our loved ones in eternity. We

face struggles financially. We face struggles of brokenness. And in all of that, God says: I'm bigger than this! It's a storm now, but tomorrow the sun will shine and I will be your God and we will go forward from this.

God doesn't want us to carry our worries. He says: I send that Holy Spirit that you will find comfort, that you will find assurance in what it is you do.

I want you to know there are times that I'm not always as happy with God as I ought to be. And I'm embarrassed to say that. When my dad died and I went through a divorce and I went through brokenness and I made dumb decisions either financially or in some other form in my life, I would be broken and say: God where have you been? God would say: Open your eyes and think, I have been here all the time.

We get moments of deep dark depression and God says: Don't give up. I am your God. I am strong. I am by your side. This is what I have to remind myself: God was, God is, and God always will be long before the beginning of time, before Jeff and you, God was and God is and God always will be with us. We need to remember those times in the past. There is no greater affirmation to me of my faith when I think I can't go on and I have a bad day today is: How did I get through my divorce? The tears, the brokenness, the broken heartedness. How did I get through when my grandmothers died and my grandfathers died and my father died? How did I get through when I was out of money? How did I get through when I didn't go to the college I wanted to do? Our lives are filled with brokenness and when you look back you say: you know what? I'm here today because God was with me. God is with me. God always will be with me. That's the kind of God we have. In the brokenness of life, God says: in the dry times of life, you will still stand because God says: Why are you still standing? Why? Why is it for you? It's because I remember. I remember God's presence for me. And God says: I love you, I need you and I will always love you. Repeat that mantra every day.

God loves you, God needs you, and God will always love you. I don't know any better phrases that we could remember. In the brokenness of our world, when others around us aren't always supportive to remember God is with us and we know that the tighter we come with God, the more we read, the more we pray, the more we serve, the more we give, the more we are in touch with God in our life.

We talk about soul partners, right? Soulmates? You want the soulmate? It's you and God. It's me and God. When you get tight with God you can face anything. And you will come out okay because God will be with you.

Paul said it this way: I, in my weakness, I'm the strongest. That was the first sermon I preached in high school, when I realized I don't have what it takes but God through me can make all things happen.

So, here's this story, it's found in the first book of Ephesians. If you look, in my Bible there's

a map so to speak of what it is to have on this armor of God. It starts off with the truth: the belt of truthfulness. Truth is everything. Truth is everything. When I was young if my parents caught me lying, or it wasn't a good thing, right? Was it for you? We have news today, we believe it and we don't even track to make sure it is news, right? Anything on the internet, just 'cause it's there doesn't mean it is true. They can take my head and put it on a good looking body. Is that going to be true? It doesn't make it true, right? We can do anything. We need to search for truth and you and I as the people of God need to do this. We need to speak the truth.

There was another truth my grandmothers and my mother and my father taught me: If you don't have something good to say, (People speak.) Folks, we need to get on board with that around here. The world around us is so free to be ugly to each other and the world around us is looking for Christians to be different and we aren't. We are being ugly. We need to be light, all the time not some of the time.

This breastplate: there is nothing that hurts more. When you went into battle if you didn't trust this... Went to the Civil War, you know, if you got wounded in the legs and arms they would take you and remove that. If you got wounded here they just laid you to the side and left you die because they couldn't do it. You protect the heart. Folks, you have all been hurt in the heart, right? Whether a broken relationship or disappointments in life and the things that happen. God said: I am here to protect your heart and you'll do that if you learn that what my truth is is really what's going to protect your heart; not what the world around you says, what my Word says. The more we stay in God's Word, your heart will be protected because even if others are ugly, I want you to hear this Word from the Gospel: God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that everyone who believes in Him might not perish, but might have eternal life.

Folks, even if the world around you is crushing your heart, here is God: Come on home. Come on home! I love you! I don't care where you've been; I don't care what you've done. There is a new day today. I am your God and I love you.

Folks, the world around us needs to know that love. They need to know today when they fail you are not giving up. We're not throwing them in the trash bin forever. There are second opportunities and thirds. God's grace isn't one, two, three strikes you are out. What was the 70 times 7? God wants us to know that as much as you and I need new beginnings, the people around us need new beginnings.

There was this footwear. It was to prepare you to go. Of the big feelings of the church today, we are not going. We are not going. We come in here, we get all fueled up and we go to work, go to our families, go to our friends and we say nothing about God. Oh, we'll talk about Penn State. We'll talk about our sports and we'll talk about our antiques, we'll talk about other things. We don't talk about God. Folks if we are going to take the Word and make light in the world, you and I are messengers. We need to be prepared and you don't get prepared with five or ten minutes or twenty minutes on Sunday. We prepare through faithfulness of study and prayer and service and giving.

I am going to show you how prepared the church is today it gets ugly. Oh, we are so comfortable. I got everything I wanted from God. Here's the real comfort, right? I can't even lift up my plate, I just suck all those noodles down. It's disgusting!

There was a time when we would spend time teaching our children. We would read to them and we would, as partners, read God's Word and pray together and when I was in high school, I'd go and these three girls in my school were the daughters of my guidance counselor, it was risky, but they were my friends. Anytime I would go there and go to a movie, or want to go anywhere, if they weren't finished with family devotions, I was invited to join the family devotions. If we don't teach our children, they will never be armed for the future. We put the winter clothes on them and the books and the shoes, get them ready for everything else. If we don't prepare for God, we are weakening.

How is God going to be our anchor if we don't know God? I've been in loose water. I'll reveal another sin of mine: One day my dad bought a brand new anchor. We went to Canada fishing. I'm in the front of the boat and tied the rope on it and he said: Put down the anchor, and I did and the rope when stttt... I didn't tie the rope to the boat. I just tied it to the anchor. You see, Dad wasn't very happy. That's what it's like to learn a little bit about God and not share it. Oh, I've got so many of those stories. It's called mistakes and sins.

If we are not anchored, how in the world, when the storms come, and I promise you they will, how will we stand still with God? You have to be prepared. Snow is coming shortly. I know it's bad news and most of us will have the salt and the shovels and blankets and everything else prepared because if you are not prepared there is a problem. If we want the world to change, we need to go, we need to tell the stories, we need to tell the truth, we need to be dumped out of our comfortable chairs because there are not a lot of things I'm sure of in this world, but this is one of the biggest ifs that I know: If we aren't the light of Christ and you don't like the darkness, I promise you this...it's going to get darker. I'll promise you that. That's 100% guaranteed. The light of Christ can make darkness totally disappear. Remember? A light on the hill, you don't keep it under a bushel, you keep it out. You and I are the light to change the world and the darkness. We prepare for the winter, but we need to be the light today. We need to go into the world, we need to have that shield of faith, we need to be those who: this shield of faith, what does it do? It's said the arrows are the devil. The devil sometimes comes from arrows of friends and family and coworkers. It needs to drive away the darkness, the evil.

There isn't one of us that wasn't bullied when we were younger, it wasn't finished and advertised as much as it is now. There aren't always those around who will support you, but you prepare your children and you prepare people around you that you can face those tough times.

For about seven years I was a fireman and an EMT and in those days when we went into fires, we were real close to the state fire school, we were trained there, you wore a helmet to protect you from falling debris. You wore air packs to keep your lungs safe. You wore fire protection

clothes that were anti-retardant to keep you safe from the flames. If you weren't you would be destroyed. You protect your body. Jesus Christ says we protect our body, we protect our soul. When he was mocked, he was beat, he was abused, he was hung on the cross, he did not turn against them. Instead he turned to his Father: Forgive them for they know not what they do. You see, he was so full of God that his heart was protected from the evil that probably was in his mind.

There are times when people say stuff to me, even as a pastor, and I have to pray that real quick or stuff would fly out of my mouth that I would resent forever. You know when you control your tongue, when you control your actions. We have the ability but we have to choose that. Why in the world do these people go into fires, go into battle for us, soldier and military and do those things? Because they have faith; they believe in what they do. Do you, the family of Calvary, believe this Word of God? And if so, we need to be light. We have to go strong and be in the world.

The helmet of salvation talked about protecting your mind. That's a tough place. When stuff gets into our mind it is hard to let go, but I have to remember this: He who is in me is greater than he who is in the world. The world around us is pretty tough. Jesus Christ is bigger. Jesus Christ is bigger than any of those problems we face.

Then there is the sword: the Bible, the Word of God. It cuts. The Word of God is truth. It will be our strength. It will help us in our time of need that you don't go to get the fire extinguisher at the last minute and find out it hasn't been charged for three years, right? If you don't prepare and know the Word of God, it's of no use to us. We must read it, obey it, live it and be faithful to it.

I shared a few weeks ago about the struggles of the world looking at Christians, seeing us complain in the restaurants and seeing how we care for other people. I shared this with my mom years ago: for the seven or eight years between May and September when I was in college and seminary I worked big construction: cranes and bulldozers and down in ditches and up on roofs and I was cussed out, I was read out, I was yelled out, I was screamed out, I was going through everything. But in 35 years, I've had more of it in the church to me than I ever did construction. That's a hard thing to hear, isn't it? I'm not saying here, I'm saying in 35 years. We as Christians can do better than what we are doing. If we look like the people of the world, why bother with church? We are either made new, we are either in Christ, we love Christ, we offer mercy and grace or we certainly don't represent Christ.

We need to, this is a hard one too, Proverbs and Psalms both talk about bridle. Do you know what a bridle does on a horse? Take the reins and you pull one way or another, you lead it. It says that we should bridle our tongue. This instrument in our mouth is the most dangerous instrument on earth. It brings wars in marital relationships and friendships, in national news. When we say something, you can't take it back. God's calling us to read this Word, to memorize it, to take it to heart. It's not take it or leave it advice. It's either God's Word or it's not.

And I want to tell you today, it's God's Word and you and I have the power to breathe the life changing agents in this darkness of the world today. You are light. I've seen it. But we need to consciously make sure we put on that armor every single day, to walk out of our door prepared as a Christian disciple of Jesus Christ, to be the light of the world.

Let us praise God that He trusts us with such a wonderful message, to bring the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Thanks be to Almighty God. Amen.