

**SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER**  
**The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity**

**Lessons:**<sup>1</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the eighteenth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.<sup>2</sup>

“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter’s house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith [SETH] the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.

“Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith [SETH] the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. Therefore thus saith [SETH] the LORD; Ask ye now among the heathen, who hath heard such things: the virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing. Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken? Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to

walk in paths, in a way not cast up; To make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head. I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will shew **[SHOW]** them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.”

*Or,*

Here beginneth the twenty-second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.<sup>3</sup>

“Thus saith **[SETH]** the LORD; Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word, And say, Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of David, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates: Thus saith **[SETH]** the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith **[SETH]** the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation. For thus saith **[SETH]** the LORD unto the king’s house of Judah; Thou art Gilead unto me, and the head of Lebanon: yet surely I will make thee a wilderness, and cities which are not inhabited. And I will prepare destroyers against thee, every one with his weapons: and they shall cut down thy choice cedars, and cast them into the fire. And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this great city? Then they shall answer, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them.

“Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus saith **[SETH]** the LORD touching Shallum **[SHALL-umm]** the son of Josiah king of Ju-

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<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 6:10-end (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 6:12 (KJV).

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dah, which reigned instead of Josiah his father, which went forth out of this place; He shall not return thither any more: But he shall die in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more.

“Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour’s service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; That saith [SETH], I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is cieled<sup>4</sup> [SEALED] with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith [SETH] the LORD. But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it. Therefore thus saith [SETH] the LORD concerning Jehoiakim [*dgeh-HOY-ah-kim*] the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the tenth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians.<sup>5</sup>

“... Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righ-

teousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus [**TICK-ih-kuss**], a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts. Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

**Text:**

From the Second Lesson: “*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*”<sup>6</sup> In the Name of the ✠ Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the ✠ Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

**Development:**

To some, this warning by St. Paul seems vague, otherworldly, with little relation to us or our circumstances. Surely our enemies are people like ourselves who just happen to disagree—or so some would have us believe.

But that ignores the frightening reality of our world. Yes, it is true that we sometimes face adversaries who are mere flesh

there. Stand up, stand up, for Jesus; the strife will not be long: this day, the noise of battle; the next, the victor’s song. To him that overcometh a crown of life shall be; he with the King of glory shall reign eternally.”

But let us return for a moment to our warrior of faith. Consider what this warrior brings to the battle: Truth, Righteousness, the Gospel of Peace, Faith, Salvation and the Word of God. Live in and reflect the truth always. Live a righteous life. Try always to live out the Gospel of Peace. Rely on Faith in God, trusting always in His Salvation. Study always the Word of God. You can be—must be—the warriors of God. Do not fail Him and rest assured, He will never fail you.

Let us pray:

Eternal God, abandon us not to the powers of evil. We know that we cannot face them alone, and that it is only in Your sure strength that we can stand and fight and win. Grant to us that strength that comes only from putting on the full armor of Your word. Protect us, and in Your time, gather all Your Saints together with You in glory. This we ask in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Larry Wagoner MSW<sup>7</sup>  
September 30, 2012

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<sup>1</sup> *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 43 (Canterbury Press 2008); The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928), A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxviii (South Africa 1954); A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvi (CIPBC 1963).*

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 18:1-17 (KJV).

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 22:1-19 (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> *I.e.*, has its ceiling made of.

What a warrior this person described by St. Paul is! With the ultimate in defense against evil and the works of the devil, and the most powerful of weapons, who can defeat him?

Paul says we don this armor and weapon to withstand the wiles of the devil: *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”*

Interestingly, Paul echoes his own warning in one of the grandest proclamations of faith in his letter to the Romans: *“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

This then, is the power of putting on the full armor of God: the very assurance that we cannot be wrested from the love of God. Protected by that love, we are commanded to continue our spiritual warfare. *“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”*

Supporting each other, then, we continually pray, and watch, and remain always at the ready. Yet, as we stand watch, we remember too that our might comes not from ourselves, but from our Lord: *“My brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”* If we do this, then *“ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”*

As we sing in the famous hymn, “Stand up, stand up, for Jesus; stand in his strength alone; the arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own: put on the Gospel armor, and watching unto prayer, when duty calls, or danger, be never wanting

and blood. But all too often, it is an enemy of a very different kind we must confront. It is evil, and it is real. It comes from the ruler of darkness, the devil. It shows itself as wickedness of every kind.

Paul warns the believers at Ephesus that they are engaged in spiritual warfare against the forces of evil itself. Yet, even as he warns them of the terrible powers ranked against them, he offers too the quiet assurance that they are possessed of the weapons they will need to successfully defeat the devil. And what are those weapons?

The armor of God—which consists of the girding of Truth, the breastplate of Righteousness, the shoes of Peace, the Shield of Faith, the helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit.

Truth. The ancient philosophers called the process of determining truth epistemology. This is a critical skill, because without the ability to determine what is true—and as importantly, what is not true—we are left floundering in a sea of doubt, fear, and shifting positions. The idea of a “subjective” or “relative” truth is an attack on the idea of truth, because in reality it suggests that there is no such thing as truth.

Those who wish to convince us of lies, or of unsound and dangerous propositions, often resort to this kind of nonsense. If we buy into it, they render us helpless, as we surrender our very foundation. This vital truth—which comes only from God—is the basic foundation of our Faith. It is the steadfast, unchanging and unchangeable reality to which we must hold fast. If our foundations are weak or unstable, then all that is built upon them is liable to fail but we know that in God we need have no such fear. As the Psalmist puts it, *“For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”* Truth, then, is the first of our weapons in our armory against the forces of evil.

The reason we require truth—and the real reason for religious activity—is the goal of becoming righteous. Righteousness is the quality of acting always in accord with divine law. If we act in accordance with the law of God, then how can we ever do wrong? If God is with us, then whom shall we fear? Righteousness, then, is our second weapon in the struggle against the forces of evil.

When all things are in their proper order, we sometimes say “all is well with the world.” We find ourselves in a state of peace. When God created the world, He brought light and order out of chaos. Godliness, then, flourishes in decency and order. When there is no order, and no decency, then there is no peace.

So, next we should be shod with Peace, which, too, comes from God. Interesting that it is our foundation, our footing (shod refers to the dressings of our feet) that must be peace. Peace is that sense of assuredness in the correctness and righteousness of those things that we undertake. “*Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*” These two are linked, for peace comes when one is assured of righteousness. And when these two are present, the truth and the quality of mercy must always be present as well. Peace is the third weapon the warrior of God possesses in our struggle against the forces of darkness.

Faith, sometimes called “*the evidence of things unseen*”, is to be our shield. It is the shield that protects us from the striking blows of the enemy, and so the shield of faith protects us from the slashing attacks of the evil of the world. Faith is thus our protector and trusty defense against Satan and his minions.

Throughout the Gospels, Christ repeatedly returns to the power of faith. He says the faith of the woman of Canaan [**KAY-nunn**] is so great that He cannot refuse her the healing of her daughter: “*Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*” And again,

when the Roman soldier came to Jesus to ask that his servant be healed, our LORD marveled at his faith and granted his wish.

When we are at our most defenseless, when doubt has crept in to weaken our resolve, it is faith that sustains us, nourishes us, and gives us that bridge back to the assured salvation of God.

On our head, Paul says, we are to wear the helmet of salvation. Salvation, which the Psalmist notes comes only from God. “*Salvation belongeth unto the Lord: thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah.*” When we have failed, when we have stumbled and offended, when we are at our sinful worst, it is Salvation which God grants to the believer. Salvation, then, is the sparing of the sinner from the just rewards of his or her sin, granting instead forgiveness and mercy and granting reward instead of punishment. Salvation is the act of the Almighty alone: “*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*”

Finally, now that we have our defenses in place, our weapon—the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The very thing which we believe is our only weapon, and it is all we need. The Word of God is the Scripture, manifested through the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Indeed, according to the Gospel of St. John, Jesus Christ *IS* the Word of God, the divine *Logos*: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us ....*”

And how powerful is that sword? Here is what Paul says when he writes to the Hebrews: “*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*”