

The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, 25 August 2024, Year B, Proper 16,  
Readings: Joshua 24.1-2a, 14-18, Psalm 34.15-end, **Ephesians 6.10-20**, John 6.56-69

Kleider machen Leute! Fine feathers make fine birds!

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. **Amen.** (Psalm 19.14)

This morning during the time allotted we will have a look at the reading from the Letter to the Ephesians the Letter being a significant New Testament writing outlining crucial theological concepts coupled with practical advice for Christians. It is in this letter that we encounter the concept of the Cosmic Christ as sovereign over all of creation. And last week with regard to practical advice we heard Paul or someone deeply influenced by Paul urge us to be filled with the Holy Spirit instead of wine. Did you realise that since Sunday 14 July we have been listening to passages of the letter?

- On 14 July we heard, In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. (1.7)
- On 21 July: So he [Christ] came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us [Jews and Gentiles] have access in one Spirit to the Father. (2.17-18)
- On 28 July: ...in whom [Christ] we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him. (3.12)
- On 4 August: I [the writer of the letter] ... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4.1-3)
- On 11 August: So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. (4.27)
- On 18 August: Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; **but be**

**filled with the Spirit**, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (5.15-20)

With the above survey of the letter concluded we arrive at today's reading in which the author of the letter urges us to be clothed in the whole armour of God. Fasten the belt of truth around your waist! Put on the breastplate of righteousness! Put on your feet shoes that will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. Take up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. On the last day of the Paris Olympics we were reminded of Paul's use of the runner to describe the race that is set before us. Today the author uses the armour of the Roman soldier who will have walked the streets of many a Mediterranean city and with which the people would have been acquainted urging us to equip ourselves that we may stand firm amongst the struggles we will have in this world. There is a struggle, but the struggle is not a this-worldly struggle in the first place and so a different set of clothing, markedly different from that of the Roman soldier is required. The author writes,

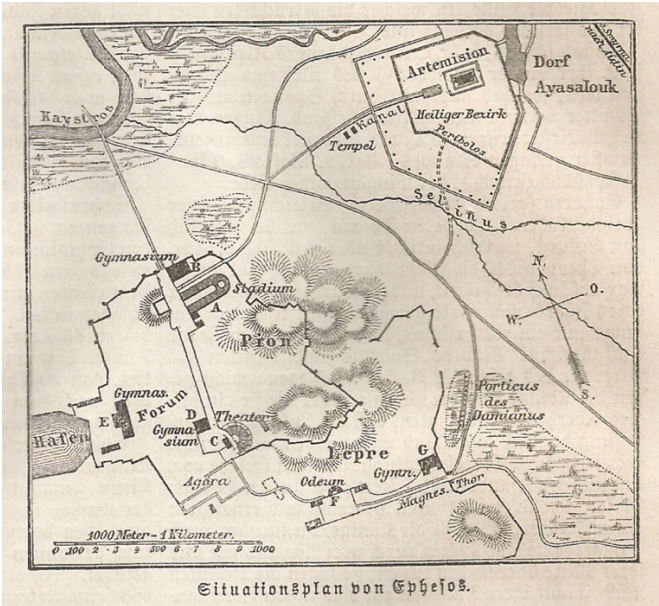
"For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (6.12)

This is the cosmic dimension I touched on above. By highlighting that in the first instance the true struggle is not against other people, captured in the wordings "flesh and blood" they are in deeper spiritual realities affecting the inter personal level. As some present know for thirteen years I was a member of the bishop's senior staff. Each time we had to deal with some tricky situation or other, of which there were too many, we quickly identified an underlying spiritual problem, a lack of rootedness in Christ, in the Gospel, in the love of God, in truthfulness often accompanied by an unwillingness to bend to God's will for the sake of the unity of the Body of Christ or in Paul's figurative language of resisting becoming a prisoner (a prisoner in chains) and in other places even a slave for

the sake of the Gospel. These metaphors of runner, soldier, prisoner, slave are given so that we might better grasp for ourselves what we are to be. What we need to become.

The author we can assume is acquainted with the great ancient city of Ephesus, the hub of the cult of Artemis and an important economic, political and cultural centre on the Eastern coast of the Aegean with a population in the region of 300,000. Many of us will have visited Ephesus, one of the seven cities mentioned in the Book of Revelation. A part of the message for the church of Ephesus reads,

“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.” (Rev. 2:2-4)



Ephesus, Meyers Konversation Lexikon, 1890

The little archaeological map of Ephesus on the front of the wrap, published in the 19th century reminds us of the prevailing Greek/Roman and Anatolian environment in which the Gospel, the Good News, was planted and in time flourished leavening all aspects of life up to today on the foundation of the Christian gospel with its Jewish antecedents and

its Greek and later Latin philosophical framing. A large part of the struggle we find ourselves in today has to do with a 'secular' anti-Christian culture that wants to overcome this foundation. But we as Christians are not without hope or comfort, because we see as the New Testament testifies, this silent witness, how the Gospel was planted and grew in an environment that was just as opposed to the Gospel as is today's. Our disadvantage is that people think they know what the Christian faith is. There is a surface familiarity with it, but the level of ignorance even in a Catholic country is great, but also amongst individual Christians themselves. And there are the numerous failings of individual Christians and leadership.

The sense Paul has of his calling throughout his ministry is that he is under God's sovereignty, command. This sort of absolute devotion, which does not sit well with us today, is not left to simply its own devices, but is to be equipped. Kleider machen Leute! God does not leave us comfortless. God equips. God resources. God meets us. The English equivalent of the German idiom of 'Kleider machen Leute!' I am informed is 'fine feathers make fine birds'. The point is that we are to equip ourselves with God's provision. We who believe, we who have been called, we who 'have been chosen before the foundation of the world to be blameless before him in love' (1.4), as we read in the letter to the Ephesians are to clothe ourselves and each other in God's truth, righteousness, peace, and these three are balanced by faith, salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Remember that this is a letter to Gentiles, written by a Jew who is a Christian and it is clear that the two, Jew and Gentile have been joined together, just as Paul writes elsewhere. Our unity is in Christ. Our identity is in Christ. Our strength is in Christ.



In today's order of service there is an image of a Roman soldier clothed not in Roman armour, but clothed in truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the sword of Spirit, which is the word of God. If we are clothed in such fine garments or desire to be clothed in such a way we will be changed by the God of grace and of all mercies working within us! Finally the letter concludes as I do with a blessing,

'Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.' (6.23)  
**Amen.**