

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2018 Year B

Psalm 34:15-22; Ephesians 6:10-20; John 6:56-69

Our Gospel reading completes... our reading of John's Gospel Chapter 6..... next week we move to a series in St Mark's Gospel..... both Clare and I have over recent weeks explored with you the richness of John's language.... The wonderful metaphors of bread and wine..... symbolising the body and blood of Jesus.... And how by living as citizens of the Kingdom of God.... God gives us life.... I summarized this with these words... to eat of the bread of heaven... to eat of the bread of life.... Is about filling ourselves with God.... Or allowing God to fill us.... To fill us in such a way that our desires change... and this is symbolised in bread and wine....

Last week John Clements built on the two previous sermons.... Exploring a short passage from St Paul to the Ephesians... reminding us that we are called by God to live as wise people.... And to understand the will of the Lord.... And God's will that we be ourselves.... And answer God's call to us to go and

do and be things that are unexpected.... Giving three examples ... his daughter who has answered her call to be a writer... his friend Andy who has gone to Australia to campaign about mining.... And his dear friend Hannah who has moved to Europe so that she can be more influential in the climate debate... each being true to their own calling.....

This week we also come to the end of the letter to the Ephesians... and I think it's a very neat conclusion to all we have been thinking about over these last four weeks.....

St Paul encourages us to put on the whole armour of God.... Full acknowledgement that we are neither strong enough nor powerful enough to do this on our own.....

Pauls says 'put on the whole armour of God so that you can stand against the wiles of the devil' ..... Clare, John and I all referred to how tough the world is at present..... the politics of the world are horrible, filled with deceit, lies and unpleasantness....

And one way that the devil can get in is to lead us to a place of despair.... Paul points out to us that the battle we face is not just enemies of flesh and blood.... But against the spiritual forces of darkness which are over taking our age..... its bigger than us... its beyond us.... That is why we need the whole armour of God..... it's the only way we can withstand it... without being drawn into it....

St Paul tells us to fasten the belt of truth around us..... truth is at a premium... one of Jesus' I am sayings is 'I am the way the truth and the life' focus on Jesus... as our guide... follow his way.... And then we will have life..... and another place he says in John's Gospel...life in all its fullness..... to protect us from all the slings and arrows of the spiritual battle we need the breast plate of righteousness..... it is not ourselves or anything that we do.... That makes us right before God.... It is because Jesus died on the cross that our sins are forgiven and we are made right with God.....

Belief in the power of the cross.... Holding on to it and the promises therein.... Becomes a breast

place of righteousness.... Reminding us not to fall into temptation.....

as shoes for our feet we are to put on whatever will make us ready to proclaim the Gospel of Truth..... Every single one of us is called to proclaim Jesus.... His incarnation... death... resurrection and ascension... and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit..... St Francis said to his followers..... go out and preach the Gospel.... And if necessary use words..... The way we choose to live our lives... the way we are with other people... the way that we forgive as we have been forgiven.... The way that we love as God loves us speaks far louder than any words.....

but we do need the words..... we do need to speak out... We do need to challenge the norms of our society... and the anything in the Church which distracts from our primary reason to be..... St Peter in his first letter said 'always be prepared to give an account for the hope that it is in you'  
Throughout my 26 years of ministry the Church has

been rediscovering its voice to speak the Gospel.... In the early 90s when I was evangelism coordinator for the Diocese of Hereford I was shocked that even Clergy questioned the need to proclaim the Gospel..... others didn't want to get involved in matters of Social Responsibility because they were not social workers....The Church has been rediscovering what it means to be Church.... And what its true purpose is..... and its has been tough... often misunderstood.... And undermined by the past sins of the Church in terms of its ill treatment of children..... and the cover ups...

we have faced the flaming darts of the hard line atheists..... those who put more faith in science that they will in the one who made science.... It has been hard rediscovering a prophetic voice... challenging the world again as Jesus did..... living as Jesus calls us to is risky... often personally costly..... sometimes outright dangerous..... lets face it ... it took him to the Cross.....

So like Jesus we need the shield of faith to quench the flaming darts of our enemy..... all that undermines the Gospel imperative.....faith is a gift... and sometimes faith fails us in dark times....

Many a faithful person have I encountered in the hospice whose faith is severely challenged by their situation.... Our shield is not just our individual faith.... It is the faith of the whole church.... When the paralysed man was unable to take himself to Jesus it was the faith and perseverance of his friends that got him there.... Sometimes we will carry others.... And sometimes the Church will carry us.....

finally the helmet of salvation..... and the sword of the spirit..... On Thursday I was reminded of the power of a helmet..... a friend of mine was knocked from his bike by a lorry in Hereford..... he went over the handle bars and remembers nothing until an hour and half later he woke up in an MRI scanner..... His helmet was completely trashed.... But it had taken the full force of the impact and that probably saved his life....

The sword of the Spirit goes before us... and it is the very word of God..... some people call the Bible the word of God... but St John called Jesus the word made flesh.... The Bible is one of the ways that we can know Jesus.... The Word is a double edged sword..... if we engage with the Word... if we

engage with Jesus... through the Scriptures it cuts us to the quick... revealing all that needs to change in us..... it encourages us.... But if we don't engage with the Word... then the other edge is judgement....

St Paul ends his letter asking the Ephesians to pray for him..... to pray for all the saints.... For all believers.... pray for him so that 'when he speaks..... a message may be given to him.....to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel.....

I'm with Paul..... in our cynical age our calling is to live the Gospel and to speak the Gospel... in season and out of season..... this present age feels like it is very out of season.... Put on the whole armour of God.... proclaim the Gospel... because when we do stand against all the evil in the world.... We feed on the bread of life.... And are filled with the power and love of God... Amen