

DRESSED FOR WORK

Ephesians 6:10-20 [MW18-26]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 26 August 2018

The maitre d'hotel of a smart hotel is reported to have stopped Groucho Marx at the entrance to the dining room, saying, "I am sorry, sir, but you cannot come in, you have no necktie." Groucho's response: "That's all right, don't be sorry. I remember the time I had no pants."

I'm sure none of you would dream of leaving your bedroom, let alone your house

- naked, that is, without clothes!
our theme is "dressed for work"
- the work of representing Jesus, sharing the life and love God gives us in Jesus engaging in actions and activities which give life
- and as I thought about it, may be our theme could perhaps be better described as "dressed for life"

So I invite you to hold on to that thought, that image

- of being dressed for work as a follower of Jesus
dressed for life as a Christian
- perhaps this morning's reading from Ephesians chapter 6 is a reminder not to leave your home naked
- that as you put your "ordinary" clothes on
remember also to put on the clothing Paul writes about:
the armour of God ... don't leave home without it
- put it on consciously every morning
and you will be appropriately prepared for anything and everything
life may throw at you

One of the most fearsome sights of the first century must have been a Roman soldier

- a squad of them marching would strike fear in the heart of the staunchest person
just one would be incredibly intimidating [slide 1]
- and then something I had not realised
Paul was not just guarded by Roman soldiers, under house arrest
as he was writing this letter to the Ephesians
- he was actually physically chained to a soldier like that [point to screen]
chained by the wrist to ensure he could not escape
- imagine that soldier beside you 24 hours a day ...

Now Paul was the kind of guy who could get alongside and talk to anyone

- and probably befriended all the soldiers guarding him
especially the one he was chained to
- however in considering the plight of followers of Jesus in that first century world
coming up against physical and spiritual enemies and barriers
a picture comes to Paul, suggested by the constant companion at the end of his wrist
- a soldier has armour ... so too does a follower of Jesus

You have most probably heard this before, so I won't labour the point, but briefly:

- there is the belt of truth – the belt gave a soldier freedom of movement
and while others might guess and grope, followers of Jesus move freely and quickly
because they know the truth

The breastplate of righteousness

- when you are clothed in righteousness you are unassailable
it is not words but deeds
living right guards against all pointing accusations

And sandals or shoes – the sign of one equipped and ready to move

- followers of Jesus are to be eager to be on the way to share the good news
with others who have not heard it

Then there is the shield – not a piddly little round shield

- Paul has in mind the great oblong shield which the heavily armed soldier wore
easily defending against sword and lance
able to extinguish flaming arrows
- faith as a shield dealing with darts of temptation and worry
a barrier against all the world or an enemy might hurl at Jesus' followers

Salvation, says Paul, is like a helmet

- protection for a vulnerable part of the body
forgiveness of sins in the past and future
strength conquer in the days to come
- but again, like a bicycle or motorcycle helmet
it's only effective when it is worn and done up properly

And then the sword – the word of God

- a defence against the assaults of the enemy
an attack against the sins of the world

Finally, Paul comes to the greatest weapon of all in the arsenal of a Christian ... prayer!

- William Barclay notes that Paul says three things about prayer:
it must be constant: pray daily, not only when there's a crisis
- secondly pray with power and intent, as if you mean it
- thirdly, pray unselfishly – as much with others and for others as for ourselves
- and importantly we are to pray for our leaders
for those engaged in the work of preaching and teaching

Remember – you wouldn't leave the house naked

- so put on these seven items of “Christian clothing”
go through them with me [slide 2]
- belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of good news, shield of faith
helmet of salvation, sword of the Spirit – the word of God, prayer
- with these seven things you will be dressed for work, dressed for life
dressed to meet all that you come across

All those seven items are vital, however I invite to choose one that is your favourite, that you think is perhaps most important, that resonates with you; and when you have done that, please just turn and share it with someone nearby.

[Time to talk/share]

Being “dressed for work” is not just for special occasions, the big times; it is for the ordinary and the everyday. I was especially taken with “the shield of faith” [slide 3] and turned to a favourite writer who seemed to have a handle on this for the ordinary and everyday. This is Philip Gulley in his book *Hometown Tales* (p.158-61)

I live in the city. If you live in a small town, you probably already feel sorry for me. Pastoring a church in the city was not my idea; it was God's. God gets blamed for a lot of things. Some people blame God when they get sick. Others blame God if their marriages fail. I blame God for the theft of our CD player. If God had kept us at a country church, this would not have happened.

I installed the CD player in the car prior to a 2000-mile drive. My wife had vetoed the idea of a CD player the year before. So one week before our trip, I had the CD player secretly installed as a gift to her. I often pick out things I want and give them to her as gifts. Once for her birthday I gave her a set of wood chisels.

The CD player was stolen while the car sat in our driveway. I called our insurance man to report the theft. He was sympathetic and promised to send me the necessary paperwork to file a claim. Three days later, Charles the mailman delivered a six-page questionnaire. The first question asked where the car was when the theft occurred. I wrote that it was in our driveway. Why was the vehicle there, the next question asked. Because our garage is full of junk, I answered. Insurance companies are awfully nosy these days.

Another question asked for the police case number. I didn't have one of those. Bill hadn't given me one. Bill is our neighborhood policeman and lives down the street from us. He works the night shift, which is the only shift our neighborhood police department works. During the daylight hours, we fend for ourselves.

Bill sleeps until supper, so I waited until he was up and about before walking down to his house to give him the news. He was embarrassed. The year before, someone else had a CD player stolen from his car. Our neighborhood was enduring a crime wave, and Bill was taking it personally.

Bill asked if I had locked the car. Of course not, I told him. If I had locked the car, the thief would have broken out a window. Better to let him at it, I say. Bill agreed. Then he suggested I put lightbulbs in my security lights. I had unscrewed the lightbulbs because they attract bats. I was afraid the bats would get tangled in my hair and drive me mad. Bill suggested I buy a hat. These are the hidden costs of crime we never think about.

Later that night, I was going through the house, turning off lights and drawing the blinds. I looked out the window. A man was walking down our lane. He stopped at our bushes and crouched there a long time. I continued to watch him. When my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I could see it was Bill. He was on a stakeout. It was cold and rainy. I wanted to take him coffee, but I had the feeling he didn't want anyone to know he was there.

I talked with him the next day. He mentioned he had been down to our house the night before. No luck, he said, but he promised to keep a close eye on things. He said sometimes a thief will give folks a week or two to replace a stolen CD player, then come back and steal the new one. So Bill has been keeping watch. I see him while I'm drawing the blinds, crouched in the bushes, his hat pulled down to keep out the bats.

If he manages to get by Bill, the thief will be in for a surprise. We didn't buy a new CD player. Instead, we took the insurance money and bought my wife a dulcimer. After the kids are asleep, Joan sits in the front room and plays. Every half hour, Bill drives down the lane and looks things over.

A long while back, the psalmist wrote about a God who neither slumbers nor sleeps, about a God who stands watch all night long, who keeps us from evil and evil from us. A celestial Bill.

I lie in bed and think of God and Bill keeping faithful watch as echoes of a dulcimer hang in the air. Fear can keep us up all night long, but faith makes one fine pillow.

“Faith makes one fine pillow”

- perhaps not as militaristic as Paul, but equally effective

This coming week I invite you to make a conscious effort every morning

- as you are putting on your 'ordinary' clothes
to also don your 'Christian clothing'
- as you dress call to mind the ... seven ... items Paul highlights
leave your bedroom, your house, with them all
consciously take them wherever you go ...
- and use as necessary

A moment to reflect, then I'll invite you to join me in praying

Prayer Book, p. 183 – Prayer number 3

*Be present, Spirit of God,
within us, your dwelling place and home,
that this house may be one where
all darkness is penetrated by your light,
all troubles calmed by your peace,
all evil redeemed by your love,
all pain transformed in your suffering,
and all dying glorified in your risen life.
Amen.*