

SERMON – 23 AUGUST 2015

READING – Ephesians 6:10-20

Ephesus was the most important city in Asia Minor, located on the Cayster River, with a harbour on the Aegean Sea. With this location it became a centre for commercial travel, and major trade routes led to it from several directions. A great pagan temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis (Diana) was located in Ephesus. Paul made the city a centre of evangelistic and church-building ministry (Acts 19), spending three years there (20:31). It was natural, therefore, for a letter intended for a wide readership in that part of Asia Minor to have Ephesus as its main destination.

Like I said on numerous occasions, there are different scholarly opinions on who the author is of this letter. I am of the opinion that it is not Paul. Why? Well this letter lacks the personal touch of the other Pauline letters. He knew the people in Ephesus intimately, yet in this epistle there are no personal greetings or specific exhortations. When we consider Paul's manner in many of his other epistles, it would be quite unlike him to have excluded these personal expressions. Quite the contrary, Paul speaks to the saints whom he has only heard about and who have only heard about him (see Eph 1:15; 3:1).

Why was the writer urging his flock to armour themselves?

Well we need to understand their world. Gnosticism was a real threat to Christians although many scholars believe that during this time not a lot of people realised this. Our author uses metaphorical and Gnostic themes to tell them to remain faithful to Jesus Christ. He is the only truth. According to Gnostic thought the evil spirits deterred anyone and everyone to reach God. Only

by having secret knowledge will help you. Now the author says no. That is not true. Christ has overpowered the evil one. His salvation means that sin, death and hell are destroyed. Each and every believer has access to God's kingdom through the salvation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, in short, he says their biggest fight is against this type of heresy, deterring them to believe in the Good News of Jesus Christ.

He says that they must be prepared to be ambassadors of Christ, with the right armour like a helmet of Christ' salvation, a belt of truth, shield of faith, sword which is the word of God, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the Gospel of peace.

What does this passage means to us?

Well we live in a totally different world. We do not have to fight against a heresy such as Gnosticism. It does not mean that we have no issues, or challenges. Life is hard and it feels as if it is getting harder by the day. Day by day we are tempted to leave our faith and hope in Jesus Christ especially when our loved ones die, when we lose our jobs, when our relationships break down. Day by day we are tempted by our world to NOT to believe in God and just carry on with life. This is especially true if you ever attend a humanist funeral. There is no hope. There is no life after death. Everything is hopeless. So live your life in the most selfish way because at the end of the day it is just you.

NO, as believers we need to tell our world about the hope and faith we have in God through Jesus Christ. We need to show our world that we have received the full pardon of God and will enter His kingdom when we close our eyes for the last time.

We have to be ambassadors too. And like any other ambassador we need to be prepared and “armoured”. We need to dress ourselves according to our beliefs, we have to act like people who have peace with God. We need to stand up this morning after communion as peacemakers wherever we go. Yes we need to go from here and show everyone the love of God that we have experienced. To be an ambassador of God’s peace is no easy task but we are called to do it everywhere we go.

You and I need to go out and “dress” ourselves according to God’s mission on this earth.

Have you ever been in a situation where you were not properly dressed?

I have. Once when I was still living in South Africa, I attended an academic conference in Cluje, Romania. While I was there, I decided to use the Sunday to go to the Transylvanian region. But I did not know Romania so I asked two students to arrange a tour for me and for the one student to drive. They did not speak much and I just assumed that we will do some sight-seeing with the car that the students hired. So on this Sunday I was dressed in shorts with flip flops just like a tourist.

At the end of the day it turned out that the student had a car licence but could not drive and that he used this opportunity to go and visit his girlfriend whose mother was the minister of a local village. So after a journey of torture we eventually reached this village and the Manse. The mother was fully dressed and said in her best English it is time to go to church. I had to sit with the

women as the daughter was my translator. And then after her sermon was finished, the mother called me to the front to address the congregation with greetings from Africa. Never in my life was I so embarrassed. There I stood in my flip flops in front of people that were dressed to the nines!

I guess the writer of this passage is urging us not be in this position. No, we need to be prepared to be God's servants. We need to hold on to God for strength and comfort. We need to live God's love despite our circumstances.

Today with communion we are experiencing again God's love and mercy. Today the Lord God is again touching our lives with His grace and mercy. Let us remind each other in the days to come how important it is to have faith, trust and hope in God.

Amen