

2021-08-22 ... 10am Service with Baptism ... Mrs Jane Rylands

Ephesians 6: 10 -20; John 6: 56 – 69

Those of you who have known me for a while will know that until I began the training for this role as a lay minister known as a Reader, I spent nearly every Sunday morning as a teacher in the Junior Church. And I can tell you, this passage from Ephesians makes every Junior Church teacher give a little whoop when they see it on the schedule ... print out a drawing of a Roman soldier and get the children to name the parts and Bob's your uncle the lesson is done! It is somewhat ironic then that for those of us in churches which follow the lectionary, the reading comes in August when we're on holiday!

Having it on the schedule for today has, however, given me the opportunity to really think about it a bit more!

This morning we welcome a family and their friends as they gather together to sacramentally bring a child into the family of God. They make promises before God to bring this child up to know about and to love God. Many of us here will have made those promises for other children.

There is something elusive about faith, acknowledged by Jesus in the Gospel reading. We know that not all find it in this life. For those of us who do, I believe we are blessed with a most wonderful gift. We are blessed with the chance to live life framed in a story of hope and love, in the promise of eternal life and eternal love.

For me, this earthly life can surely not be the only opportunity to recognise Jesus as the Son of God BUT paying attention to God in this life brings the prayer for it to be: *'on earth as it is in heaven'* into action in the here and now, makes now part of the story that Jesus began so many years ago. As believers it is our purpose and our desire to share this story of love with the world. As parents and Godparents and a church community we take on especial responsibility to share it with a particular child.

Paul has found a really good graphic metaphor in the armour of God for how to live life as a Christian. Paul knows that it can sometimes be hard to stand up for Jesus and he offers here an abc of how to stay strong in faith.

First he mentions truth – the belt which holds everything together. I wonder what you see as the truth? My understanding of the truth of God has changed over time, matured would, I hope be a better description. But I try to root my life in what for me are the basic truths - God is Good and God is Love.

Next comes the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate is what covers your heart. I think righteousness is about just and holy living. We are called to practise the way of life that Jesus showed and taught so that it becomes second nature to us.

Shoes that will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. Such a lot in this thought! Shoes presume that we will go out from our home, perhaps to somewhere nearby, perhaps far away. There is a message to be taken. And although this metaphor is armour, the message is peace.

The shield of faith seems to have a particularly valuable protective role. How do we go about sustaining the gift of faith we have received? For me remembering plays a big part here. We must tell ourselves as well as others our story as a child of God. In the Jewish tradition, the family Friday supper narrative is about remembering the story of God's faithfulness to the Hebrew people. In a similar way, at times of doubt, I can remember the times I felt God was close, the times that my prayer was answered, and I can look to the lives of other Christians and take strength from the times I saw their faith in action. **PTO**

The helmet of salvation. Salvation describes what we cannot truly understand, that somehow in dying on the cross Jesus showed us that God has saved us so that we can eternally know he loves us. I quite like the idea that this helmet is jammed on my head so that contrary to what my rational thinking might try and tell me, I can know that I am – just as I am – enough to be loved by God, now and always.

And finally, the sword of the Spirit. The sword allows us to hold out before us the Spirit – and Paul says the Spirit is the word of God. I'm not sure whether he means what we know as the Scriptures – so that just as our own memories can support us so will remembering the stories and words recorded in the Bible – or whether he means Jesus himself. Paul's letters predate the Gospels as written documents but what we know from the New Testament his listeners will know from the preaching and conversations within the early Christian community. I have found great comfort in knowing that Jesus is by my side, and when I have been anxious about something I have imagined and then almost really sensed his presence at my shoulder or walking ahead of me.

The best way of pointing Dominic, our other Godchildren, and all those others God places in our paths, to a life of faith in the one true God, is by showing him and them that following Jesus is the centre of our lives. If we are living our life wearing the whole armour of God then we can do no more to show that **God is** and that **God is Good** and **God is Love**.

Oh, there is one other thing we must do ... which Paul didn't fit into his metaphor either ... we are to pray and pray and pray ...

Amen