

Opening:

- We began a sermon series last week titled, “Suit up: the Armor of God”
 - It’s based on the scripture from Ephesians 6:10-20, where the Apostle Paul makes this “call to arms,” encouraging the reader to arm themselves with God’s weaponry and prepare to do battle against a hostile enemy.
 - Paul wants those hearing these words to understand that they are engaged in a battle—a spiritual conflict.
 - He invokes the image of a soldier going into battle as a metaphor to convey his point.
- Paul recognizes the great challenge which lies in front of his friends.
 - Life in ancient times was more terrifying for Christians than it is today.
 - In those times, people believed implicitly in evil, spiritual beings, who filled the air around them.
 - And these beings were determined to bring harm to people.
 - Some are superhuman forces, allied against God and God’s people.
 - Paul sees the whole universe as a battleground.
 - And the people to whom Paul is writing will contend not only with attacks from men, but also with attacks from these spiritual forces.
 - Forces which aim to thwart God’s plans.
 - God’s plan is to transform the world and these forces will do their best to destroy it.
 - God’s plan, through the resurrection of Jesus, is to break down the walls of division and hostility between people—walls such as gender, race, religion, culture, orientation and yes, even political affiliation.
 - And the forces of evil aim to rebuild those walls.
 - Today, while we may not share Paul’s understanding as it relates to the presence of these spiritual beings, our life experiences have taught us that evil is at work in our world.
 - We see it every day and surely, all of us at some point in our lives, have felt this force of evil which seeks to influence us into sin.

The Weapons of Battle

- To repel the assault from these forces, requires divine assistance.
 - Any good soldier knows that if you are going into battle, you better have the right weapons, a good plan and a strong heart.

- This week, I was reminded of a conversation I had with one of my former bosses back in high school.
 - He was from Switzerland and he was telling me how during WWII, Hitler had made plans to invade his country, but was dissuaded from doing so, due to the rapid mobilization of the Swiss army.
 - He told me it took less than three days for Switzerland to be fully mobilized and ready against an invasion.
 - I remember thinking to myself that the Swiss Alps were probably the greater discouragement to Hitler, than the small Swiss army.
- Still, this does show that in battle, preparedness brings about its own good fortune.
- And the opposite can be said about unpreparedness.
 - Leading up to WWII, France had constructed a series of concrete fortifications, known as the Maginot line.
 - And as WWII was beginning, France believed that they were safe against Hitler behind this line, which stretched for over 200 miles on the NE border of France.
 - With its state-of-the-art design, thick concrete walls, heavy guns, store houses and underground rails, they believed themselves ready to hold off any attack from the north.
 - Hitler's army however defeated this fortified defense by simply going around it, through the Ardennes forest, which the French had also considered impenetrable.
 - France fell in defeat because they relied on the wrong weapons.
- Paul sees his friends as warriors about to go into battle and he encourages them to have the right weapons with them.
 - And he offers them a list of those things they need as they prepare for battle.

The Belt of Truth

- Today, we are looking at one of those tools, the "belt of truth".
 - A belt is quite a useful item, serving both a fashionable and functional purpose.
 - Nearly every morning, as I get dressed, I reach for a belt.
 - The belt helps hold my pants in place.
 - The belt also enhances the look of my wardrobe.
 - And of course, the belt can provide a truthful measure as to one's waistline. Is my belt looser or tighter than it was last week?
- The belt was a very functional item for the Roman soldier who wore a tunic, an outer garment that served as his primary clothing.
 - The tunic was typically made of a large, square-shaped piece of material with holes cut out for the head and arms.
 - Ordinarily it draped loosely over most of the soldier's body.

- And since ancient combat was mostly hand-to-hand, a loose tunic was a hindrance during battle.
- So, before a battle the tunic was carefully cinched up and tucked into a heavy leather belt that would hold everything in and provide freedom of movement.
- In the same way, according to Paul, **the Christian's belt**—the belt which girds our spiritual tunic—is truth.
 - Others may flounder and be hindered in their quest for knowledge and wisdom as to what is truth.
 - But for Paul the Christian moves freely and decisively, because he or she knows the truth.

What is truth?

- But what exactly is truth?
 - It seems that these days, the answer to that question can be elusive.
 - Because it greatly depends on who you ask.
 - It was Mark Twain who said, get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please.
 - These days, it seems fairly common practice to either ignore the facts, or distort them in ways to suit what one wants to believe.
 - And it seems that the truth can have multiple versions.
 - In our world, truth can be found through uncompromising literalism.
 - And yet just the same, truth can exist relative to culture and society, without any absolutes.
 - My truth or your truth can be simply what we believe or WANT to believe.
- You have probably heard the old fable about the six blind men who came upon an elephant.
 - One took a hold of the elephant's tail and declared that the elephant was like a rope.
 - Another felt the elephant's great side and said it was like a wall.
 - Another felt the tusk and said it was like a spear.
 - And on and on.
 - That tale pretty well illustrates the complexity of understanding truth in today's world.

The challenge: Finding the truth

- This has major implications for this spiritual battle Paul speaks of.
 - And while the pursuit of truth can be challenging, discovering the truth is important.
 - It's important because it is a major determinant in how you see God and live your life.
 - And it will greatly impact your faith.
- Jesus was clear in his meaning of the word truth.
 - He was referring to the truth about who he is.

- Jesus said, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31-32).
- In that statement, Jesus calls us to be witnesses to the truth of who he is, by our lives.
- And he is saying that the truth is found both in your intellect and in your heart.
 - The world may be confused where it concerns spiritual truth.
 - But Jesus is not confused.
 - Jesus sees that God’s truth is found between the literalism exhibited by the Pharisees and the relativism of the world.
 - And Jesus knows that if we continue to seek after him, follow him and know him, we will discover the truth about God.
 - And when we apply that truth in our daily lives, we can be liberated from the forces of evil.
- So, unlike the myth of the six blind men, we are not blind to the truth.
 - God has opened our eyes and revealed the truth to us in Jesus Christ.

Where do you turn to seek the Truth?

- It seems right that Paul would start with the belt of truth.
 - Knowing the truth really is the foundation, from which things like righteousness, peace and faith spring forth.
 - As people of faith, if we are to grow and thrive, amidst evil which exists in our world, don’t you think we better have a grounding in the foundation of our faith?
 - Will knowing what’s in the Bible help us in the heat of the battle?
 - Do you think knowing the Lord’s prayer by heart will help?
 - Maybe brush up on the Apostle’s creed and other confessions of our faith?
 - And learn how to better apply these prayers, creeds and confessions in our daily living.
 - This past week, I had an occasion to pull out my statement of faith.
 - That is a document of mine which has been a work in progress for years.
 - It is my personal statement about who I believe God is, and about who I am as a person of God.
 - It is a product of both my intellect and my heart.
 - Those beliefs guide me in my daily living, as I strive to become the person God wants me to be.
 - It had been a while since I had read it and it’s good that I review it every so often.
 - Because each time I do, I rewrite it just a little to reflect my continued growth as a person of faith, as I endure to seek and discover God’s truth.

- I decided to print it off and I've placed it where I'll see it each morning, right next to my star word, which I received at the beginning of the year.
 - It's my way of tucking that statement into my belt of truth, so to speak.
 - Seeing my statement of faith there will be a reminder to me of who I am and to whom I belong.
 - And I wonder if perhaps there is something there in both of those- speaking truth to me- that will help mold me into the person God wants me to be.

What are you tucking into your belt?

- Friends, what are you tucking into your belt of truth these days?
 - Are you working to grow in your faith and understanding of who God is and who you are as a child of God?
 - Is your Bible tucked into your belt and are you reading it?
 - As we battle against a terrible, evil enemy, I think we'd be wise to have it.
 - Here in this church, we have any number of opportunities to study God's truth.
 - We have a men's Bible study group that meets every Wednesday at 6:30, to discuss, deliberate and pray for God's truth.
 - The women's Bible study meets monthly for fellowship and the study of God's word.
 - On Sunday morning, we have a Seekers class, a Disciples class, Choir class, the stressed nest and many other offerings.
 - So, the question is not about the availability of opportunities to seek and discover God's truth.
 - The question is are you sincere in your desire to grow in understanding God's truth and in what ways are you seeking it?

Wrap it up

- On that day long ago, as Jesus stood before Pilate, he said to him, "I came into the world, to testify to the truth."
 - Do you remember how Pilate responded?
 - He said "What is truth?"
 - That is a question that the world is still asking today, and still believes there is no real answer.
 - But the truth was standing in front of Pilate and everyone else that day and they could not see it.
 - And today, the truth stands before many who cannot see it.
 - That's why it is important to, as the Bible says, "Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist."
- As we head into battle, may God's truth be your armor.
- And may you wear your belt of truth today and always.

- Amen.