

Ephesians 6:10-18 (NRSV)

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.*

“Ryan, you can preach whatever you want, so long as you don’t preach about politics!”

“The church should keep out of politics.”

“The bible has nothing to do with politics.”

Over the course of my career in ministry, I’ve heard some version of

those statements in every congregation I’ve served. And every time I hear it, I try to suppress a chuckle, because the word “politics” is derived from the Greek word polis, which means “city” or “community.”

At its most basic definition, politics is about the life of the community. And consequently, you might say that anytime there is more than one person involved in anything, there are sure to be politics.

And we know this. There are family politics. There are office politics. There are neighborhood politics.

And the church, by its very nature, is awash with politics, as it should be, for if we’re not having a running conversation as members of the body of Christ about our communal life together, then what are we even doing here?

And by that same measure, the gospel of Jesus Christ is inherently political, because everything about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is about the greater good.

But what transpired in our nation’s capital on Wednesday had nothing to do with that definition of politics. What transpired was not a conversation about tax rates or business regulation or foreign relations that turned into an argument that got a little overheated.

No, what transpired in our nation’s capital on Wednesday was demonic.

Let me be perfectly clear. I am not suggesting that the President or any elected official is a demon. What I am saying is that the writer of Ephesians makes it plain that there are spiritual forces of evil at work in our land, demonic forces that are diametrically opposed to God's stated mission of the blessing of all the families of the earth. Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

What happened Wednesday was the latest manifestation of this demonic power that has been brewing and growing in our country for a long time.

We can know it's demonic because while God seeks the blessing of all the families of the earth, this demon only seeks to satiate its own lust for power.

We know it's demonic because it while God creates order and beauty, this demon delights in sowing chaos and fear.

We know it's demonic because while God seeks the preservation and promotion of the truth, this demon traffics in lies, and when it's confronted with the truth, it only howls and shrieks and spits out even bigger, louder lies.

We know it's demonic because rather than affirming the fundamental truth that all of us were created equal and endowed by God with certain inalienable rights, the demon holds that

power can only be legitimately exercised by straight white men, and it violently resists any attempt to suggest otherwise.

We know it's demonic because it co-opts Christian symbols and imagery, and sadly, even pastors and whole congregations to prop up its demonic lies.

Some of our earthly rulers and authorities have flirted with this dangerous demonic power in an effort to advance their own power, but on Wednesday, the demon turned and came for many of them.

And we know it's demonic because even after five people were killed and dozens of people were injured, even after lives have been and will be completely upended as citizens face incarceration for federal charges, some of our earthly rulers and authorities still refuse to name and renounce the demon.

We know it's demonic because it's trying to tell us that the hard work of justice and truth-telling are steps that can be skipped on the road to reconciliation and eventual healing, and we should just "move along in the name of unity."

You and I both know that not everyone who went to the capitol on Wednesday went with the intention of doing violence. Some, perhaps even most, went to exercise the rights of peaceable assembly guaranteed to them in the First Amendment.

But the demon is not interested in peaceable assembly. The demon knows how to turn a gathering into a mob. The demon knows how to turn a peaceful march into a riot. We've seen it time and again throughout our history.

And, I'm afraid, the demon is not done. This is a time for the people of God to be in deep, fervent prayer for the safety of every elected official and for the safety of every man and woman charged with their security. This is a time for the people of God to be in deep, fervent prayer for the safety of those who are the objects of the demon's scorn, people of color, those whose sex and gender expressions are non-binary, anyone who does not fit the demon's notions of an idealized type.

I'd like to tell you that if we just pray hard enough, if we just work hard enough, we will vanquish the demon together. But sadly, that is not true. The demon has been around a long time. It's crafty and smart and just when you think it's gone, it comes roaring back again.

But the good news is that the demon has already been vanquished. It was vanquished over 2,000 years ago in a place called Calvary. The cosmic powers of this present darkness have already been vanquished by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but for reasons passing my understanding, God allows them to roam in this world for just a little while more. But make no mistake. Their day is already done.

So while we wait for their final judgment, we are put on the full armor of God and stand together. We are to put on the full armor of God – the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, the shoes of the gospel of peace, and take up the shield of faith and the sword of the Word of God, and then, having done everything, stand.

Which seems anticlimactic, doesn't it? We want to be ordered to march. We want to be ordered to fight. Onward Christian soldiers, and all that jazz.

But we are instructed to get ourselves ready, and then to just stand. To hold our ground. To refuse to strike first.

On the night that Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, Peter took his sword and struck one of the men who had come to arrest Jesus, cutting off his right ear. Jesus rebuked Peter and said, "Put away your sword, for those who live by the sword will die by the sword." Then Jesus reached out his hand and healed the man's ear, so committed was he to the way of non-violence.

We are not allowed to meet hatred with hatred. We are not allowed to meet evil with evil. We are to put on the full armor of God, and then hold firm.

I'm nervous about what the demon that we saw on Wednesday is going to do next. It's wounded, it's

exposed, and it's furious. I don't want to stand. I want to run and hide.

So this is a time for the people of God to be sure we're wearing the full armor of God – the helmet of salvation. Make sure you're protecting your head. Don't spend all day doom-scrolling or glued to the television. Use the critical thinking skills that God gave you. Remember that you have been saved by the grace of Jesus Christ, and nothing can ever take that away.

Wear the breastplate of righteousness around your heart. Examine your heart before you speak or hit the "send" button.

Wear the buckle of truth around your waist. Don't get shaken by a head fake.

Be ready to move your feet quickly to wherever there is a need to stand and proclaim the gospel of peace.

And take up the shield of faith. Remember, the shield of faith doesn't just protect you. It protects the people standing next to you, too. In fact, it works best if a whole bunch of shields are lined up together side by side. This is a time to be checking on your sisters and brothers in faith and encouraging one another when the flaming arrows start to fly your way.

None of us knows what tomorrow will hold. But we know the One who holds tomorrow. We know how this battle will end. The demon will not prevail against the body of Christ. It has

tried and failed for going on 2,000 years now, and it will fail again this time.

Because as Bishop Desmond Tutu has reminded us so beautifully,

Goodness is still stronger than evil.

Love is still stronger than hate.

Light is still stronger than darkness.

Life is still stronger than death.

And victory is and ever shall be ours through him who was born and lived for us, who was betrayed and crucified for us, who died and was raised for us, who reigns in power for us, and who, even now, even in this moment of great peril, prays for us.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.