

From Pastor Marissa Becklin

Siblings in Christ,

The following is the message I shared with our community at Denver Day Worship on Sunday, August 22.

From the earliest days of this pandemic, God has blessed the faith community of Faith United with patience and resolve to care for our neighbor. We have seen one another, through God's help, as partners on a journey, not as adversaries that we differ in opinion from. We've not missed a single Sunday of worship because of quick adaptation to online format, our first Saturday of the month food ministry of Peter's Porch made a quick transition to drive-thru and never stopped serving the community, we've been extremely blessed by the gifts of many in our faith community volunteering to help in a number of new and creative ways, and we've seen how God's love endures and even takes center stage in the midst of challenge.

This year and a half has not, of course, been all joy and celebration. Change is hard for us all, and the fear of this year combined with the temptation from the outer world to fall into the traps of politics and argument have worn on us all. This is why I chose the reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians this morning.

When we are on edge like we have been since March of 2020, our temptation is to prepare for battle. We do so by putting on the armor of the world—we put on distrust like a breastplate, skepticism like a belt, self-righteousness like a shield, our political assumptions like a helmet that will echo in our ears as we run, and anger like shoes to carry us. This is what the news tells us to do, this is what the world tells us to do, this is what our head tells us to do—to double down in what we already think, to become wary of others, and to harden our hearts.

This armor is faulty, though. The echo chamber ringing in our ears actually keeps us from hearing the voice of God, the distrust we wear as a breastplate limits our movement and keeps us from turning toward our neighbor, and the anger weighs our feet down. None of this armor actually serves us, and it certainly does not serve God. We know this, because we've seen what comes of relying on this armor over the past year and a half. We've seen vitriol and hatred and an unwillingness to think outside of one's own perspective create pain in our communities, nation, and world.

Paul reminds us in our reading today that there is good news—we can set all of that stuff down. We can take it off and lighten our shoulders, and instead put on the armor that God gives. The belt of truth, which invites us to be patient and hear other perspectives, listen for credibility, and above all consider God's truth rather than our own. We pursue truth not by listening for any opinion that confirms what we hope to hear or what we want to believe, but rather by listening carefully and attentively to those that God has blessed with the gifts of knowledge, wisdom, and skill. We put on the breastplate of righteousness (not pride in ourselves, but rather we place on our hearts the sign of having been loved and claimed by God). We wear this in hopes that this is how others will see us, and it reminds us too that God calls us to see others as loved by God as well. For shoes we will put on whatever makes us ready to proclaim peace. Not war, not argument, not false niceties, but real, true peace. God's intention for us is to speak a word of reconciliation and hope into this weary world. We usher that peace into existence by beginning with ourselves, apologizing to those we have wronged and asking them and God for forgiveness and new life in relationship. The shield of faith will protect us from the power of the evil one, because by the gift of faith that we've been given by the Holy Spirit, God has set us free from the powers of sin and death. The helmet of salvation echoes the noise of that freedom in our ears as we walk, and the sword of the Spirit is the word of God.

These are the tools that God has given us to get through challenging and fearful times. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Spirit. This is armor for the cultivation of peace—not the waging of war. This armor protects and preserves us against the power of evil defining and overtaking us.

We are loved by a God who is deeply invested in the cultivation of peace in our hearts, our homes, our communities, our nations, and our world. We are loved by a God who is defined by graciousness. We are claimed and made new each day by God, who has poured out his life for us on the cross so that we might be set free from sin and death and be united with God forever.

This good news, this hopeful promise of God's enduring love and constant preservation, is what has carried us through this year and a half as a faith community. It is what will carry us into the future, as well. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray. Gracious God, we come to you today with shoulders that are weighed down and feet that are heavy with the armor that the world has given us. We ask for your strength to remove these burdens of anger, assumption, and self-righteousness, that we may be set free to put on instead your peace, salvation, and truth. Make us faithful servants of your peace in this world, and preserve us as we continue to weather this pandemic. In your name we pray, Amen. *In God's peace, Pastor Marissa*