



*Under Armour*

*Ephesians 6:10-20*

*Last in the sermon series on Ephesians*

*Sunday, August 26th, 2018*

*First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*

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Text: 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 place. (v.12)

This is my grandfather Jaynes' cane. He said that he needed it in order to keep dogs away when he went on his daily walks but I suspect that it was to help keep him be steady on his feet.

Several years ago in Venice, Florida the mother of a martial arts instructor named Buck Buckmaster was attacked coming out of a grocery store. She was knocked to the ground and robbed. In response to this incident Buckmaster decided to offer a self-defense course to the residents of the retirement community where his mother lived. Using their canes, walkers, purses and whatever else they may have the residents learn how to defend themselves from attacks. Attackers do not want a fight. They do not want to risk injury. They want to hit and run so an aggressive defense will dissuade most attackers.

There is a YouTube video showing the residents going through their self-defense exercises. In an interview the residents talked about how they felt empowered. They didn't feel vulnerable. They knew what to do. They had an air of unmistakable confidence.

In our epistle lesson today the writer concluded this letter by talking about battling the great forces of evil in this world.

Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote,

“You know the Caledonian Railway in Edinburgh? One cold east windy morning I met Satan there.”

We do not know what happened at that Edinburgh Railway but I believe that we all know what Stevenson meant. We have all experienced the icy touch of evil that chills the bones and sends a shiver down the spine.

The personification of evil is not central to the biblical understanding of evil. That is not to say that evil is not personal. People are not evil but people do evil things. Evil is a force that hypnotizes people and nations. It is like a nebulous cloud blanketing and infecting those whom it envelopes. Evil appeals to our lesser angels.

It is the Tempter in the Garden who told Eve that if she ate the forbidden fruit she would not die, but become wise like God. Evil plays to our fears and insecurities telling us that we are weak, vulnerable and “not such a much”. It sows gossip. That is why gossip is one of the sins that the New Testament epistles focus so much attention upon. Evil feeds red meat to our prejudices--after all, you may remember that one has to be very carefully taught.

You've got to be taught  
To hate and fear,  
You've got to be taught  
From year to year,  
It's got to be drummed  
In your dear little ear  
You've got to be carefully taught.  
You've got to be taught to be afraid  
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,  
And people whose skin is a different shade,  
You've got to be carefully taught.  
You've got to be taught before it's too late,  
Before you are six or seven or eight,  
To hate all the people your relatives hate,  
You've got to be carefully taught!

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Evil is the green eyes of jealousy and the heat of hatred.

Evil gives rise to feelings of privilege, systematic discrimination and self-justification. Evil dehumanizes and objectifies. It causes crushing poverty, stupid famine, war, and senseless mindless shootings in our cities.

These enemies are not mere flesh and blood. No, they are the cosmic powers of darkness. They are the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places.

In the face of evil, we are to be dressed for battle. We are to put on the defensive armor of Truth, Righteousness and Proclaim the gospel of Peace.

We are to lift the shield of Faith--Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things unseen. (Hebrews 11:1)

Most of all, we are constant in prayer. We are to pray to be alert. We are to pray for each other. We are to pray and stand by the persecuted, the misunderstood, the marginalized and the forgotten.

And do you know why we do this? We do this because we are baptized ambassadors of God's kingdom heralders of that Kingdom here on earth who defiantly and boldly proclaim the gospel of the One who is the Light of the World. We do it for the glory of God that the glory of God alone.