

Be God's!

I love this prayer. You may have heard it: *Dear Lord, so far today, God, I've done all right. I haven't gossiped, haven't lost my temper, haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or over-indulgent. I'm really glad about that. But, in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed, and from then on, I'm probably going to need a lot more help. Thank you. Amen.*

Every morning, as soon as our feet hit the floor, we're faced with choices. Choice seems to be the common thread in all of our readings this morning. One of the first choices we have to make every day is what to wear. For seven weeks running, our second reading has come from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Today we're at the end of this letter Paul wrote from prison. (That's why the reading started with the word "finally." And today Paul gives us advice about what to wear. Put on the armor of God: put on truth, righteousness, peace, faith, the gift of salvation, and the word of God inspired by the Spirit. All that will be more than enough help to navigate the day after you get out of bed.

I'm reminded of a hymn by Charles Wesley I learned when I was in Vacation Bible School: *Soldiers of Christ, arise, and put your armor on.* Invoking militaristic imagery seems like a contradiction for followers of the One we call the Prince of Peace. But when I think about it, this was really rather subversive. The New Testament came out of a world that knew military occupation. Roman soldiers were everywhere. So it was rather a common sight to see such armor. For the apostle Paul to draw on that familiar image was to meet people where they are, and to reclaim an image that represented oppression and make it life-giving and freeing. It gave them options. Choices. It offered a way to engage in sacred resistance. Think of the armor of GOD. What a concept!

I put Paul's words here in the same category as that famous passage from Isaiah that talks about turning our spears into pruning hooks and our swords into plowshares. This is a Biblical witness that reclaims instruments of violence and oppression for peace. As shoes for your feet, Paul says, put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. What might those shoes look like for you? What choice can you make to make that happen? Christians often say, "If you want peace, work for justice." Buddhists say, "If you want peace, BE peace." What choices can you make in order to BE peace today? You're *here*. That's a great start.

Our other readings lay out some choices for us as well. In our first reading, we bump into that verse that we've probably all read first on a plaque on someone's wall. Maybe you even have one at your house. "*Choose* this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house," the plaque usually says, "we will serve the Lord." The context for *this* choice that is put forth to God's people is the ancient Near East. In that culture covenant means agreement or alliance. It describes relationships. Covenant is the primary word used to characterize the relationship between God and Israel. God has delivered Israel from slavery and so God has already begun the relationship. Joshua calls upon the people to respond – to make a choice. Will you serve the gods of your ancestors in their life of slavery? Or will you serve the God who delivers you from slavery into freedom?

And in our Gospel, there's a context as well. Many people take offense at Jesus' invitation to eat his flesh and drink his blood. This teaching is too tough to swallow. Pardon the pun! Even many of Jesus' disciples make the choice to "peel off" at this point. And so, like Joshua and Paul today, Jesus challenges them with a choice: "Do you also want to leave?" But Peter's pretty clear about the choice he's making. By this point, Peter doesn't *see* any other option. "Where else can we go? *You* have the words of *real* life, eternal life. We've already committed ourselves, confident that you are the Holy One of God."

Dietrich Bonehoeffer was martyred because of his commitment to discipleship through work in the resistance during the rise of Hitler and Naziism in 1940s Germany. He made some choices too. He was living a comfortable life as a student of theology in New York City. And with the rise of fascism in his home country, he chose to return there and do what he could help the resistance movement and ended up participating in a plot

to assassinate Hitler. During his time in prison he wrote letters and papers and poems. In one poem, like Paul he draws upon militaristic imagery and leads us into some deeper thinking about the choices we make each day: "...is something within me," he asks, "still like a beaten army, fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved? Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine. Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine." Whoever I am, you know, O God, that I am yours.

That was the point Joshua was making in our first reading. God had already initiated that relationship, that covenant. The people already belonged to God. They just had to accept the relationship that God had already established. That's the point Paul is making. The armor of God is there and available. It's just a matter of putting it on. Maybe the real choice, and the only choice we have is to decide, "Who's am I going to be?"

Rich Mullins of blessed memory is a song writer who may be best known for the song, "Awesome God." He wrote with passion and honesty about the holy, fiery love of God and the claim this God makes on those who would follow Jesus. His musical legacy won him quite a following over the years. But Mullins never drew attention to himself. And whenever fans would ask him to sign a picture or CD, he had a trademark way of keeping things in focus. In life, as in his music, Mullins pointed to Christ. He would simply write: *Be God's. Rich.*

Be God's. That's B – e. And capital G-o-d-apostrophe-s. Not be gods, as in be a god. Everything in our culture points us to *that* choice every day, to be a god, even before we get out of bed. We're bombarded incessantly with messages that tell us to put ourselves at the center of things, to live with the mistaken notion that it all depends on us, and that it's all about us. But that is not true.

Your call during this exciting time of discovery as a congregation is to be who you are, see what you have, and do what matters to God. I'm pleased to report that the Circle One leaders have completed their work and their report is now in the hands of the vestry. Be who you are. Who *are* you? You are God's! You are God's people, by virtue of your baptism into the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to be faith, to be hope, to be love, to be peace, because faith, hope, love and peace have already been given you. Name it and claim it! You don't have to *choose* it. Just open yourselves to *receive* it. What a concept! It's called the grace of God. All authentic mission and ministry, what you are here to do and be, points to the *Source* of our lives, never to ourselves. Dear brothers and sisters, as you move into your next chapter, every morning, even before your feet hit the floor, be who you are. Be God's!

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Sources:

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