Title: *Putting On the Armor of God* Homecrest PC

Scripture: *Psalm 84* and *Ephesians 6:10-20* 8/26/18

 By the show of hands, how many of you keep your eyes opened when you pray? I would think most people would naturally close their eyes when they pray…perhaps it helps them stay focus their hearts on God and not be distracted by various movements or noises around them. On a more practical level, when we pray with our eyes open, we resist the temptation of falling asleep. We remain alert and engage in active listening to what God has to say to us, and NOT what we have to say to God. After all, don’t you think God knows what’s on our hearts, even before we know it ourselves?

 Some people pray while they are driving or walking. Some pray out loud while others pray in silence. Some pray kneeling down and some standing up. Some prays in the morning and some pray in the evening. Some pray 5x a day and some 24/7, while some only pray as needed or they are in desperate needs of some divine interventions. Whatever format or frequency of prayers that one may take on, one thing we do know for sure is that there is no one fixed way to pray.

 As I alluded to earlier, **prayer is a mutual dialogue and NEVER a one-way conversation.** **God hears us not by our audible voice, the choice of the right words, or physical postures, but by the sincerity and genuineness of our hearts.**

 When I was growing up in my home church, I was part of a weekly small group gathering of about 6-7 of us. We usually meet on a weeknight after work rotating somewhere in Manhattan. Sometimes it’s in Bryant Park, if the weather is nice, or in someone’s office conference room. Sometimes we meet in a restaurant or in a nearby coffee shop like Starbuck’s. And then there’s my favorite place to be - the food court in the basement of the 33rd Street Midtown Manhattan Mall. I’m not sure if that still exist anymore.

 As customary, we opened and concluded our time together with prayers. Just as everyone was about to close their eyes and bowed their heads for prayers, suddenly I realized that, “Wait a Minute, we are in the middle of NYC. We cannot all closed our eyes to pray at the same time. People may walk away with our stuff, especially when we’re not watching. So, one of us needs to keep watch of our belongings when we prayed.

 As awkward as it may seem, I volunteer to keep my eyes opened when we pray. With my eyes wide opened scanning across the food court, all of a sudden I began to notice there were a lot of other people out there. I noticed there was a young man who was in his mid-upper 20’s, wearing T-Shirt and jeans, going from table-to-table asking if people had finished their food and drinks.

A little further away, I noticed a mother with two kids going from station to station in the food court sampling different food, perhaps this was their way of getting their meal of the day, or maybe they were just hungry.

Then there was a cleaning lady, who didn’t speak much English, going from table-to-table gathering and wiping the trays and cleaning up the leftover food that people left behind. From the look on her face, she was not happy at what she was doing, but at least it was a job – better than no job at all.

 Further away I overheard conversations of a couple who was arguing and having a difficult time in their relationship. I heard co-workers who were complaining about their boss and other co-workers, gossiping on office politics. The list goes on and on and on. To be honest, I got caught up with what I saw around us. I realized, all of a sudden, there were all these other people around us. How we would’ve missed all of this, if we had kept our eyes closed while we pray. **Those people around us needed more prayers than we do ourselves.**

Often times when we pray, we only focus on OUR needs, OUR problems and OUR situations, as if that’s the most important thing that God needs to hear. What about those who are “out there”? Don’t you think that God already knows what’s on our hearts and what we need…so in a way, prayer is kind of “redundant”. Or perhaps we ought to listen and observe to the people who are out there, those who are being marginalized, more vulnerable than we are, desperately yearning for prayers by others as well.

As we talked about last week, each day we are called upon to make wise and important choices, whether consciously or subconsciously. God has granted us the wisdom to choose what is right. God entrusted us that we would **choose God first** and above all things, and not choose the other forms of “gods” and “temptations” in our lives. This is called Free Will. As Christ challenged us to “***look out for our neighbors and to love them as God has loved us****”,* each day God has led us to the frontline of the spiritual battlefield while equipping and keeping us out of evil harm’s way.

**When we pray with our eyes opened, we become more aware of who and what’s around us, not only to protect ourselves but also to be a vigilant “look out” and to pray for those around us other than ourselves. Our prayers become outward focused rather than inward focused upon our needs.**

As Joseph read for us earlier from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, Paul continued his theme of extending encouragement of faith to the early church. Even though he could not be there with them in person, Paul continued to lift them up in his prayers. He encouraged the Ephesians to “***Put on the Armor of God***” and to stand firm of their faith and not to lose faith in spite of them facing harassment, discrimination, and even persecutions day-by-day. Not only do we need to keep our eyes to ourselves but we also need to remain vigilant upon our neighbors as well, as we keep one another accountable. This is going to be an epic challenge all the way through till the end of time.

When it comes to prayer, it is more than just the words that we say on our mouths. **When we pray, it is a reflection of our faith and relationship with our God, as well as our act of worship.** One of my highly respected mentors once told me that “**our whole life shall be nothing but a life-long continuous prayer with God. Every breath that we take shall be a dedication and reflection of God’s glory!”**

As we meditated on last week that we need to **make the most of every opportunity so that we may be agents of God’s love to others.** Pray that we can be difference maker in someone else’s lives. Have compassions upon others, the less we focus on ourselves and our own needs, the more we are empathetic to the needs of others.

 Paul reminded us that we shall ***pray continually (or pray without ceasing) and give thanks [to God and to others] in all circumstances.*[[1]](#footnote-1) *“Pray [therefore] in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication of all the saints.”*[[2]](#footnote-2)**

 God hears us no matter how big or small our prayer requests may be. This does not mean that God will grant us whatever we pray for, but know that **God hears our genuine cries and sincerities of our hearts.** No prayers are too small and no plans are too big for God.

 As the Psalmist declared earlier in the Responsive Reading that we read taking from *Psalm 84*, ***“For a day in God’s courts is better than a thousand elsewhere*.[[3]](#footnote-3) *Happy are those who live in God’s presence and in God’s house, ever singing our praises. Happy are those whose strength is in the LORD, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.”[[4]](#footnote-4)*** Prayer is one way of keeping our line of communication and maintaining a healthy relationship with God.

When we are in stride with God, we shall become more like God, in word and in deeds. I know this may be easier said than done. It does take a great deal of self-discipline and willingness to be transformed by God, as we put on our new selves of Godly righteousness and holiness, as Paul put it. **Our prayers are the best defense we can put on against the evils of this world! Through our fervent prayers, we acknowledge God’s living presence each day.**

This is the Good News for all of us today, as “ambassadors”[[5]](#footnote-5) for Christ that we keep our hearts and our minds focused on God’s calling in our lives. **Not only are we to put on our armor to defend ourselves from forces of evil, but we ought to be prayer warriors for others, and be the peacemakers of this world as well**.

 This is especially more vital in these days and in a world that seem to be filled with voices and intentions of civil animosity and discourse, violence and hatred. As believers of Christ, God challenges us to be different and to stand out. It’s OK for us to be different and not be complacent or to simply go along with the flow of this world. As Paul reminded the early believers in Rome, *“Do not be conformed to [the pattern of] this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-- what is good and acceptable and perfect.”[[6]](#footnote-6)*

 As ambassadors of Christ, we are being called to demonstrate **God’s way is better than the world’s way**. We don’t need to pretend to be someone whom we are not. We don’t need to try to fit into the inner circles or to climb the social ladder, as I mentioned in my youth message earlier**. It’s challenging enough for us just to be ourselves…be as God’s human reflections, the hands and feet of deliverers of God’s love and hope in this world.** God has promised us to provide us with all the abundant resources that we may need…more than anything that this world has to offer to us.

 Through the ***Belt of Truth***, the ***Sword of the Spirit***, the ***Feet of Peace***, the ***Helmet of Salvation***, the ***Breastplate of Righteoueness***, and last but not least, the ***Shield of Faith***, these armors of God will not only protect us from evil harm’s way but will serve as our resources of strength and renewal each day. God has offered these to us so that we may use them through our challenges and struggles each day.

 As one theologian put it, *“struggles can be part of the process of faith development where spiritual growth, deepened into a mature faith, is valued. Struggle may also be seen as a resource and as opportunity for spiritual growth where followers of the Way stay alert to evil, pray, nurture one another’s growth, and hold one another accountable.*

 *God’s rich mercies and spiritual resources are found among people and in nature. Spiritual resources enable us to stand firm and endure in the struggle – against systemic forces, the principalities, the power, the rulers of this present darkness.”[[7]](#footnote-7)*

 So therefore, **let us keep our eyes opened when we pray. Let us keep our full Armor of God on and be on the ready for the journey ahead and the spiritual battle that we still need to fight.**

 In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit….and all of God’s people say, Amen.

1. *I Thessalonians 5:17-18* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Ephesians 6:18* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Psalm 84:10* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Psalm 84:4-5* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Ephesians 6:20* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Romans 12:2* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Smith, Jr., Archie *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 3,* P.378 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)