

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

Sunday, May 16, 2021

Ephesians, Chapters 5 and 6

“Instructions for Christian Living”

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell, Senior Pastor

Ashley S. Ashley, Associate Pastor – Welcome, Announcements and Opening Prayer

Hello, everyone. Welcome to the worship of God for Sunday May 16th here at the First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth. It is wonderful to have you with us this morning!

Helping lead in worship with me today are pastors Emily Campbell and Mark Hovermale. We also have Darlene Maginley here who will do our children's message. And for music this morning we have Carole Moon who will be singing, and she will be accompanied by Sue Scott on the organ and by Sharon Smith on the piano.

As always a big, big, big thank you to Susan Underhill for her video skills and editing. You all have no idea what goes on behind the scenes and without her, trust me, none of this would be possible! So we're very thankful for all of that.

I have a couple of announcements this morning that I want to share before we dive into worship. The first is that our Earth Care team would like you to know that the next deadline to order fair trade coffee is coming up this Wednesday, May 19th. Please see this morning's bulletin for details on how to order.

My next announcement is that on Saturday, May 22nd our local mission committee, along with the worship committee, will be hosting a collection drive from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. here in the church parking lot for the Northville Civic Concern. They will be collecting boxes of cereal, breakfast bars and canned fruit. As always a big thank you in advance to everyone who, we know, will give generously. Thank you!

On Monday, May 24th, our Presbyterian women will host their May book club. The group will meet at 7:00 p.m. in the church parking lot, or on Zoom if there happens to be rain. But details are in the bulletin and you are encouraged to contact Nancy White in order to RSVP.

There will be another book group opportunity, this time on Thursday, May 27th. This one will be led by the Learning and Discussion Working Group. They will meet on Zoom at 7:00 p.m. to discuss the book “Arc of Justice.” Please contact Sharon Holcomb for the Zoom link and to learn more about this book and why we're meeting.

Finally, I invite you to save the date for Saturday, June 12th, because Fitness in Christ will be sponsoring a fundraiser for the Second Mile Center. Again, please see today's bulletin for details about the event and how to sign up and participate. I also invite you to check out the new weekly exercise opportunities and activities that Fitness in Christ is hosting.

There's a lot of announcements, which is exciting! As you can hear, there is so much going on in the life of our congregation! Again, I invite you to look at the bulletin, and read with care so you don't miss out on anything that God is leading us to do here at our church.

But for now let us quiet our hearts and our minds. Let us prepare to worship God on this great new day, and as we do that let us pray.

Gracious and loving God, you are the light of the hearts that see you, the life of the souls that love you, the strength of the thoughts that seek you. We know that to turn from you is to fall, to turn toward you is to rise, and to abide in you is to stand fast forever. Although we are unworthy to approach you or to ask anything at all of you, grant us your grace and blessing this day. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Carole Moon sings “All Creatures of Our God and King”
(Accompanied by Sharon Smith and Sue Scott)

Darlene Maginley, Director of Children’s Ministry – Children’s Message

Good morning, kids. So we have been talking about the book of Ephesians. In the very last chapter of the book of Ephesians, God tells us that when things get really tough to put on the full armor of God. And this is what the armor of God is. You put on a belt of truth, you put on a breastplate of righteousness. Now a breastplate is the thing that covers your chest in battle so that you don't get hurt. Then you're supposed to put on the shield of faith.

So you're holding a shield, you have a breastplate, you have a belt on and you're supposed to put on a helmet of salvation. Will you think about all of this. You have something that covers your chest and you're holding a shield and you have a helmet, and you have a belt on and you have a sword of truth. You have all of these things to protect yourself. It's like when a soldier is going into battle has to be protected, and that's what God wants for us.

When we go out into the world, he wants us to be protected with Him. Well I was thinking about this the other day. So you have the shield and you have the thing covering your chest and you have the helmet on your head, but what's behind you? There's nothing on your back and you know why that is? Because God does not want us to turn around and run the other way when things get tough! God wants us to stand firm and to share the truth about Him with the world, and if we do that God will have our back.

Let's pray. Dear God, thank you for protecting us with truth and salvation and righteousness. We ask that you help us to stand strong and to share the word of God with all of those around us, even when sometimes the world can get tough. Thanks for having our back at all times. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Mark Hovermale – Reading of First Scripture Lesson

We're looking today at the end of the book of Ephesians. As we look at the end of the book, I would like to remind you that this is a short book containing six chapters that split into two different parts. Now the first three chapters deal specifically with doctrine, which is a fancy word for saying what do you and I believe. What do we believe? Here we learn about the role of Christ uniting us in one family of faith and hope and love and grace. So hope, love and grace unite us together in Christ.

The last three chapters provide us with application, which basically means how do we live out what we believe in the real world. With that in mind we're now going to turn our

attention to Ephesians, chapters 5 and 6 to learn more about all the doctrine and, more importantly right now for us, the application.

Our first scripture lesson today is found with different verses in Ephesians chapter 5.

Ephesians 5:1-2 (NIV)

¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:8-11 (NIV)

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

Ephesians 5:15-20 (NIV)

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell — Reading of Second Scripture Lesson: Ephesians 6:10-20

Our second scripture lesson today comes from the sixth chapter of the book of Ephesians, beginning at verse 10. The Apostle Paul writes,

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

May God add His blessing to this reading from His holy word. Amen.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell — Sermon: “Instructions for Christian Living”

Would you all please pray with me. Guide us, oh God, by your Word and Spirit, that in your light we may see light; and in your truth, find freedom; and in your will may we discover the gift of your peace. This, we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

I learned how to drive when I was 16 years old, and in my mind I was a very good driver. I was a safe and competent driver, a knowledgeable driver. I never doubted my driving knowledge or my driving ability, until at age 26 I moved to Scotland. At that point I thought maybe I should just give up driving for good!

My first week in driving on the left side of a Scottish road with a manual transmission was not my finest hour. Not only did I stall over and over and over again. I drove most often at a 45 degree angle, as two of my wheels were on the curb as I overcompensated for being on the left. Now the minister I worked with at the time, Fergus Buchanan, was very patient with me. He would take me out driving; literally, my first week of living in Scotland, my first week working in Scotland. He’d say, so very calmly, “Emily, I think you’re a wee bit far over there on the left. His words were always so calm, but his face was always so red, and his knuckles were so white, that I wondered why something was so very difficult that I had already been doing for so long in my life.

That bad feeling that I would never be able to become good at something—something, that I had been trying to do for many years, I think, at times, that is exactly how every single one of us feels about living out our Christian faith. How many years must we practice before we become good at it? Does it ever become easier? I’ve been walking this road, trying to live out my Christian faith for 35 years now, and there are still days where I feel as if I am no further along, and I have no idea what I am doing.

The Apostle Paul must have felt that there were people like him who would benefit from knowing how to apply deep Christian beliefs to their everyday lives. This, I think is why he wrote the book of Ephesians. He structured it in such a way that the first three chapters speak of all the deep beliefs of the Christian faith and then the last three chapters speak about how to apply those deep concepts about God to our everyday lives.

It’s one thing for us to have knowledge, but without being able to live out what we believe our faith neither grows nor shines. We persist living in darkness. In Ephesians, chapters 5 and 6, Paul tries to make things as simple as possible. He says, follow God’s example, walk in the way of love.

Pastor and author Eugene Peterson, in his paraphrase of the Bible, “The Message,” in his translation of these verses from Ephesians 5, he writes:

“Keep company with God and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn’t love in order to get something from us, but to give everything of himself to us.”

Love like that love, where you try to give yourself to others, as opposed to trying to receive back love. By your actions be known for your love in all your relationships. We are called to have love be the characteristic that sets our faith apart in our friendships, in our relationships with our neighbors, within our church. Let God’s love point us to love others.

Now I think it would be helpful at this point for us all to keep in mind who’s writing these words, these words about love. We forget so quickly that the Apostle Paul is writing these

words. We remember he's in prison, but we would do well to remember this is the apostle that hated, absolutely hated, the people he was now in prison for loving! His life had turned around so dramatically, his heart had changed so much, that rather than being known as the one who persecuted others, he was known for being the one who loved others.

Would others say the same about us? The love, we are told in Ephesians, chapter 5, is characterized by two distinct features. The first of which is, love is supposed to be characterized by light, which is an absence of darkness. The light that is spoken about in that chapter is found in verses 8 through 10. The light, we're told there, is characterized by goodness, which means being kind to others in your actions. It's characterized by righteousness, being honest in all things, and by truth. But further in Ephesians, chapter 5, we're told that Christian love is also characterized by our devotion. We are called to love by treating each person as a precious child of God. Because we see each person differently, we treat each other with care and with value, serving each other in love regardless of our position or status.

This way of loving impacts all of our relationships. It impacts our marriages, our relationships with our children; it impacts our relationships with our colleagues at work. There are verses in Ephesians chapter, 5, when read out of context, I know have the potential to raise a lot of people's blood pressure. In Ephesians, chapter 5, beginning at verse 22, it speaks of wives submitting to their husbands and husbands giving their lives to their wives as Christ gave his life for the church. Each is called to serve each other in love. Each is called to serve God in love.

This call to love humbly with a servant's heart applies not only in marriages but to parents and their children, to adult children and their parents. They are supposed to serve each other humbly, with patience, with care, and with devotion.

This passage also speaks of slaves and masters, but we would do well today to understand this as workers and employers. We need God's help in order to love in this sacrificial way. We need God's help to keep us humble, to keep us open to helping and caring and giving.

We can't do this on our own, which is why the Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians, chapter 6 about putting on the full armor of God. Our own strength will only take us so far, the Apostle Paul writes. He says in verse 14, "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place."

Paul tells us that we're going to need the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, Word of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Not only are we generously gifted with these resources by God so that we have the opportunity to know God more and to love God more, and through them love others, but we are called to pray to God's Spirit for help.

The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians, chapter 6, pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. Don't worry about praying too much or saying words that God would not understand. God understands. God delights in the abundance and the variety of our prayers. We're told to be alert, always praying for the Lord's people, keep your mind on God and on others, rather than getting lost in the sea of our own troubles. Let God care for you and let others pray for you.

I love Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this passage from Ephesians 6. He writes,

“Be prepared! You are up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over you can still be standing on your feet. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith and salvation are more than just words. Learn how to apply them in your lives. You're going to need them throughout your life. God's Word is an indispensable weapon. In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing battle. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up, so that no one falls behind and no one drops out ever.”

For a church that has been worshipping outside its building for over 14 months, these words sound as if they could have been written about the Covid pandemic! How do we encourage each other while we are apart from each other? How do we make sure no one falls behind and no one drops out? We are called to pray for each other and, in so doing, show the love of God for each other.

Friends, our faith is not faith unless it is lived out in every challenge we face in life, gives us the opportunity to drop to our knees and to trust not in our resources, but in the abundant provision of God. Let us put on the full armor of God and march forward fearlessly into the future. Amen.

Carole Moon sings “Onward Christian Soldiers”
(Accompanied by Sharon Smith and Sue Scott)

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell — Prayers of the People and the Benediction & Blessing

Would you all please pray with me.

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the love and grace you so generously offer to each of us. We thank you, dear God, for also meeting us at the point of our need and helping us to move forward in faith. We pray today, dear God, for those who are in need of your love and care. We remember and pray for anyone who is sick and ask, dear God, that you would bring healing and help to them. For those who care for the sick, Lord, grant extra resources of patience and love and grace.

We pray as well today, dear God, for those who are mourning the loss of loved ones. Fill them, we pray, with your resurrection hope. Remind them that in Christ's life and death, resurrection and ascension, life does not end in death but carries on with you forever. Lord, may we find strength in your resurrection power.

We thank you for the resources you provide for us in our Christian lives, for the gift of your Word and Spirit. We thank you for the gift of one another and we thank you for the opportunity to pray for one another. We do pray today for people throughout the world who are in need. We remember countries where Covid is still raging and we ask, God, for help, for an end to this pandemic.

We pray, dear God, for wisdom and guidance for us as we seek to return to life in a more normal sense. May we be faithful at every step to your call upon us and may we, Lord, be mindful of how best to care for your people in need.

Please hear all these prayers today, the prayers we have said together and the prayers that each of us lift up from our hearts and minds. In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayers and hear us as we gather all our prayers together in the prayer of your Son, who taught us when we pray to say together,

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

Friends, as we come to the conclusion of our study on Ephesians, I leave you with these words written by the Apostle Paul, from Ephesians chapter 3,

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.”

And may the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest upon you and upon all those whom you love, this day and forevermore. Amen.