

Over the past five weeks we have been exploring what it means to be the Church. In our first week we explored what it means for the Church to Redeemed, what it means for the Church to find its purpose and meaning in redeeming work of Jesus Christ. In our second week we explored what it means for the Church to Reconciled, what it means that we as a community are marked by reconciliation and forgiveness. In our third week we explored what it means for the Church to be a Servant of the Gospel, to be shaped by the Good News of Jesus Christ and his call to share it with the world. In our fourth week we explored what it means for the Church to be the body of Christ, to be a community of Christian each with unique gifts and abilities devoted to the building up of the body of Christ. Last week we explored what it means for the Church to be Renewed, what it means for the Church to turn away from the idols of our day and live a life directed towards God. Today we come to end of our exploration of the Ephesians, we come to the end of our exploration of the question “What is the Church?”, and we move on to the question “What is Grace Church?” What does our future hold? What does it mean to be a community shaped by Christ’s redemption or reconciliation? With the amalgamation now essentially complete, it is our time to begin answering these questions. It is our time as a community – each and every one of us – to determine what it will mean to be Grace Church in Scarborough. As beautiful as this building is, it is not the church, **we** are the Church, **we** are the embassy of the Kingdom of God here in this community: so I ask you “What is Grace Church?”

Perhaps the answer that we can get from the past five weeks is that being Grace Church will be not easy. Paul’s call for the Church to be: redeemed, reconciled, servant of the gospel, the body of Christ and renewed is a momentous task, and probably more than each of us expected when we began our lives in the Church. It will be a challenge to live up to our call to be redeemed, to live into God’s great act of the redemption of the whole cosmos. It will be a challenge for us to live into Christ’s call to be a community marked by reconciliation and forgiveness, when division and strife continue to persist. It will be a challenge for us to embrace the call to be servants of the Gospel, to proclaim the Good News in word and deed, since it is far more comfortable to remain where we are than risk rejection and humiliation. It will be a challenge for us to truly be the body of Christ, to acknowledge and exercise the gifts that God has given each and every one of us, to grow up into the full stature of Christ. And finally will be a challenge to live the renewed life, to reject and dethrone the idols which tempt and draw our attention and worship away from the triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To top it all off, in our passage from Ephesians today Paul states that our struggle is “not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against rulers, against authorities, against the cosmic powers of the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Whatever you believe about the existence of the devil or evil forces that are opposed to God, Paul states that there are large and powerful forces that challenge the existence of the Church and its participation in the mission of God to redeem all things in Christ. Whether it is the power of sin in the world which draws the Church away from its calling, or the power of secular culture which marginalizes and rejects the purpose of the Church, or the economic and social forces in our world which continue to oppress the poor and marginalized and exploit God’s good creation: it is hard to argue that Church’s task of living up to God’s calling is difficult if not near on impossible.

The calling and life of the Church may be too difficult to live out of our own power, but thankfully we are not left defenseless and naked. In our passage from Ephesians we hear: “therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all these take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to

withstand all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” God does not leave us empty handed.

But what do it mean for us as Grace Church to take up the whole armour of God?

Understanding and claiming truth is an important step in our identity as Grace Church. For us the only truth which matters, the only truth which has bearing on our life together is the Truth revealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In John’s Gospel, Jesus says he is the way, the truth and the life. Jesus is the Truth and therefore, for us to fasten the belt of truth is to allow for the life and teaching of Jesus to be the only influence in our life together as a Church. As a Church we need to continually examine everything we do through the lens of this truth. Does our worship, our fellowship, our community events or governance reflect the image of Jesus? If not, than we need to change it.

Paul continues by stating we need to put on the breastplate of righteousness. In Christ, God has restored us to right relationship with God: this is the breastplate of righteousness. As we strive to recognize the Lordship of God, as we strive to honour and glorify God in all that we do as Church we live into the righteousness that God has promised us. Paul continues: for shoes we put on whatever allows us to preach the Gospel of peace. As a Church we need to remove obstacles that stop us from proclaiming the Gospel, we need to find ways make it easy for us to share the Good News of peace in Christ. As a community we need to ask: does our worship, programs, sermons, community events, and our fellowship make it easier for us to share the Gospel?

The next two pieces are interconnected: the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation. We are a community that has received the gift of faith from God and the assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ. As we claim the faith and trust in God’s promises and as we claim the assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ we can live in confidence, we can face the challenges and obstacles of the world in the sure knowledge of God’s love, mercy and faithfulness. As a community we need to ask: Do we as a community trust in God’s provision? Do we trust that God will lavish his grace, love and mercy down upon Grace Church? Do we as a community live out of that faith and assurance?

Paul ends with the Sword of Spirit or the Word of God. The word of God, the Bible that we read and pray faithfully week in and week out, is the primary way that we as a community are formed by the Holy Spirit, so that we can grow into the full stature of Christ. Just as water streaming over rock will slowly overtime erode the rock and make grooves and channels, as we continue to read and pray the Holy Scriptures our imaginations are slowly transformed by the working of the Holy Spirit. Reading and studying the Bible provides us the greatest opportunity to learn what it means to be the Church and is the foundational gift of God to the Church, and to us at Grace Church. As a community we need to ask: Do we allow the Bible to form who we are as a community? Are we as a community continually seeking to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit in and through read and studying the Bible together?

On this Sunday, as we take time to honour and remember the men, women and children of the world who gave their lives in wars and in service to safeguard the peace and freedoms we enjoy, let us also remember that the Church is involved in its own struggles, that the Church is also involved in the spiritual warfare against the powers and principalities of the world. As we remember the gifts and talents of the men and women who served and are serving this country, let us also remember that God has given this Church gifts, let us remember that he has given this Church the means to live out our calling to be redeemed, reconciled and renewed. And for that I say thanks be to God!