

Means and Ends  
Ephesians 6:10-20  
August 22, 2021  
First Presbyterian, Luling

This is going to be yet another week where the sermon title doesn't match the sermon. Don't try to make it work. Sometimes the Spirit moves in a different direction at the end of the week than at the beginning. So it goes.

Several years ago now, I took several classes from Charley over at Icehouse Pottery. The classes were always held on Saturdays, and on one particular Saturday, I also had a friend's wedding to attend. This is when we lived in Gonzales, and another friend was going to pick me up from the pottery on the way to the wedding. That was fantastic, except that I am a messy potter, and pottery is a messy process, and I always ended the classes absolutely covered in wet, slimy, clay, which gradually dried to crusty mud that made a terrible mess wherever I went. I clearly could not wear my pottery clothes to a wedding. So I brought along wedding clothes and did a quick change in the bathroom at the pottery, as class was ending. I emerged in nice clothes and quipped something that I intended to be funny, something like "so which is the real Monica? The one wearing dirty, old clothes? Or this one in wedding clothes?" Charley, as I remember, responded something like, "Oh, I think both are the real you." As Charley's wisdom so often is, he was exactly right.

In one sense, what we wear on the outside doesn't change who we are on the inside. But what we wear on the outside can reflect our identity, especially the way we understand our own identity. If we work at a job that requires a uniform, we visibly have that identity, whenever we're wearing the uniform. Some of my colleagues choose to wear clerical collars for this very reason—so they'll be visibly and obviously clergy.

I know I've told some of you this—a friend who is one of the chaplains at Dell Children's has modeled his ministry on that of Mr. Rogers. When he arrives at his office in the hospital, he takes off his home shoes, puts on his hospital shoes. Puts on his clerical collar. Puts on his cardigan. In this outfit and part of his identity, he is Chaplain Chris, and he is ready to minister to patients and families in the ICU. At the end of the day, he reverses the process and puts his regular clothes back on. In that outfit, he is husband and dad, and can insulate his family from the pain he has seen at the hospital that day.

This week, as kids go back to school, some for the first time in person in over a year, facebook has been full of “first day of school” photos, complete with outfits. Some are dressier than usual. Some are carefully chosen. Others are random from whatever was on top of the clean clothes pile. By far the most outstanding and eye catching first day outfit was on Wyatt. He’s the fourth grade son of some friends. He lives in Austin, where the dress code is considerably looser than it is in our district. He was wearing long black pants, a black shirt, red tennis shoes. Not terribly eye catching. Then he had put on top of his shirt a multicolored blazer that I will not be able to do justice: a batik print with pink and orange and green and purple and maroon. And then it’s almost completely covered in embroidery. But that’s not all. He has it topped off with a purple top hat. And best of all, a huge smile on his face. His mom says they went back-to-school shopping at Goodwill, and this is what he picked. Wyatt has, on the very first day of school, proclaimed that he is his very own person, joyful and exuberant. This is the identity he is expressing, which is who he is inside, and now it’s visible to everyone at school.

When the writer of Ephesians tells the Christians in Ephesus to “put on the whole armor of God,” I think it’s a combination of these kinds of outfits, or clothing philosophies, or identity expressions. I’m not sure what to call it, obviously. But Christians get our purpose from the armor of God, we have specific things that we are expressing, and this armor itself makes us into who God is calling us to be.

The purpose of wearing the whole armor of God is in the first couple of sentences of the passage. God has called us to stand against the wiles of the devil, struggle against the rulers, authorities, and powers of this present darkness, against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. I don’t doubt that all of those powers need to be opposed, and earlier in Ephesians, we have already heard that God has won this ultimate victory, but these powers have obviously not given up. That’s why this is the armor of God, and not the armor of humans trying to be really good and strong. It requires God’s strength and God’s power to fight against evil forces in all places. This present darkness seems pretty bleak some days, and we are strengthened precisely because this armor belongs to God. Our purpose and calling is clear. As clear as the purpose of the HEB cashier wearing that red shirt, as clear as the nurse wearing scrubs, as clear as the firefighter suiting up. Our purpose is to fight the forces of evil.

And we do not fight the forces of evil with evil. We fight the forces of evil with good. Truth, righteousness, peace, salvation, Spirit, word of God. Those are

our weapons, most all of them defensive. Tools is really a better word, I think. Those are our tools. Here's where the means and ends idea from earlier in the week fits in. We can't use evil to fight evil. We have to use the weapons or tools or means that match God's ends. Like Chaplain Chris puts on Mr. Rogers's cardigan, he puts on Mr. Rogers's kindness and gentleness, because that's what he knows his patients and their families will need. We use the gifts of the Spirit to stand firm against the forces that oppose God.

Finally, because we are wearing the armor that belongs to God, and because that armor gives us tools of truth and goodness, what we are wearing makes us into the people God has called us to be. Ideally, we wear that armor of God so faithfully and consistently that it becomes our identity on the outside as well as the inside. That when people look at us, they see people of truth and righteousness, people of peace and Spirit. Sweet Wyatt has a bold outfit on for the first day of school, that invites his teachers and peers to see him as fun and unique and outgoing. I don't know Wyatt well enough to know if that matches his character at all. But I suspect that he's a little bit of those things, and that his outfit, along with the perceptions he's cultivating by wearing that outfit, will give him a little boost to be fun and unique and outgoing and exuberant more often than not. What we wear on the outside, the armor of God, calls us to live up to those things, calls us to live into those things, so that more and more we are made into the image of Christ, that more and more we embody truth and faithfulness and righteousness, peace, salvation, the Spirit, the word of God.

Put on the whole armor of God, friends, for the sake of yourselves, and for the sake of the world.