

August 23, 2015 13th Sunday After Pentecost Ephesians 6:10-20

Our second reading from Ephesians talks about spiritual warfare and being prepared for it. The military imagery may seem almost poetic to us. After all, we live with religious freedom. We don't have people attacking us every day for being Christian. Well, perhaps we do, but we keep them at our nation's borders and far from us.

And yet we do wage a fierce spiritual battle every day. Evil is very very subtle, and what an effective way to do battle: attack in such a way that the person doesn't even realize the attack.

If evil were blunt and obvious and straightforward you would attack it clearly. You'd find energy to wage the battle. But evil is clever - attack quietly, gently and in an unnoticed way and you will slip into its grasp. Consider a parallel with your health. If you have a sudden blockage in an artery you'll notice it. You may have no energy. You may lose your breath quickly. You may have a heart attack. Something is clearly wrong and you have to do something about it. Stents or bypass surgery or something major will be done.

By contrast think about what happens when your doctor sits you down and tells you that your blood sugar is too high or you have high cholesterol. You want to say, "Prove it." Who cares what a number on a piece of paper says? You can't feel it. It doesn't affect your moment to moment life. While the problem is just as real and just as destructive as an actual blood clot, you can just ignore it - possibly for decades. The problem is too subtle.

Similarly evil works on us. You've heard me complain before about advertisements. In order for an advertisement to work on you it first has to convince you that you have a need. It has to convince you that there is something wrong with you or your life - you aren't good looking enough, or cool enough, or smart enough or whatever the case may be - and then if you buy the product your problems will be solved. In other words, the advertisement has to convince you that what God made you to be isn't good enough.

But it's far broader. I see so many people frantically running all day every day doing all sorts of tasks - but for what? The average parent gets up, drops the kids off at daycare, rushes to work, works all day, rushes home, picks up the kids, then takes them to sports or dance or some activity,

then takes them home - somewhere along the way a meal is eaten, then to homework, bed, perhaps a little down time; and then do it all over again. Over and over and over again goes the pattern until the kids are grown. What is actually accomplished other than to teach the next generation to also run itself ragged?

I think most people desperately want to feel worthwhile. They want to think they're doing something of significance in this world. But everything is fast past and disposable. Computers and virtual reality don't help. Virtual reality stuff is really really cool, but it doesn't give the satisfaction of something real. You can create a whole world on Minecraft and it can be really sophisticated and really fun, but it isn't real.

I've been surprised this year the number of people who've expressed interest in helping to cultivate the potatoes in our garden project. More people asked to help than I could accommodate. Why? I think it's because it's something real. And not like going out and spending time pulling weeds in your landscaping - it's real work in the real earth doing something that will actually put food on someone's table. All of the

potatoes are being donated to the Victor-Farmington Food Cupboard.

Once in a while I go to the food court at Eastview Mall and just watch the people there. All too often I see people craving something real in their lives. They desperately want a purpose.

Evil's cleverness is to let us live safe lives but rob us of what God gave us - a worthwhile existence and meaningful work to do. How often do you go to bed at night feeling like you've actually accomplished something of value in the day?

This is spiritual warfare of the hardest kind. I want to conclude with this rather lengthy prayer called "Let Something Essential Happen to Me" by Ted Loder in the book *Guerillas of Grace*.