**20200517\_TheBeltOfTruth**

I want to also recognize there are countless numbers of us who've been affected by the Corona virus. What I'm learning and understanding is that grief is personal. And at the very same time, it's a communal thing. One where gathering surrounded by the family of God is so vital and important. And so our hope is that, uh, even now we would be the community of God with one another.

Um, church comes from the Greek word ekklesia, which appears over a hundred times in scripture. It's simply a gathering of those who are called out by Christ. We are made to be with. Then I pray that you and I wouldn't wait for the chance to be with in a building with must happen now with must happen using whatever creative means we can whisk with.

Must be because we've been called out by Christ to be a light to the nations. This is his chosen method in and through us. So creative thinkers out there, maybe fervent prayer warriors are wealthy business owners, moms and dads who have new vision for their family and raising their kids with a different pace of life.

Skilled craftsmen and crafts woman kid. Kids who may be guilty of dreaming too big or the physically unable. It's time to rise up and let's take our stand as a light in the darkness. Not waiting for the then, but be with each other now that we can be with each other. Uh, they're not just here at the church that we can be present though in this time limited.

Maybe God would allow us to think outside of the box in these days, to grieve alongside of those who are grieving and to be with those who we physically can't be with. But we can in spirit and in truth. We're continuing our communion service this morning with a perfect passage of scripture. It's, it's simple.

It's a timely message for us to apply now, and it's a foundational. Passage for our study as we continue on spiritual warfare. Um, I'm reminded this morning as we approach God's word, uh, from, uh, the, the writer David who writes in Psalm one 19 about his love of God's law and commands and statutes. And so I wanted to just read before we even dive into a Fijian six maybe, that you and I would catch a fresh, new way of looking at God's scriptures.

And here is what it says in Psalm one 1989 three 95 your word Lord is eternal. It stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations. You established the earth and did endorse. Your laws endure to this day for all things serve you. If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.

I will never forget your precepts for by them. You have preserved my life, saved me for I am yours. I have sought out your precepts. The wicked are waiting to destroy me. But I will ponder your statutes, man. As we come to Ephesians chapter six I think it is so important for us to to develop and to gain an understanding and a love for the scriptures.

As David writes here in the book of Psalms. Now let's dive in. Not to quickly change gears, but dive in right to Ephesians chapter six so if you want to flip there in your Bibles, I will have it here on the screen, but I'd encourage you have a Bible, have a highlighter, maybe take some notes this morning.

A man, what a gift it is that we can be so keyed in even while we're at home together. So Ephesians chapter six here we go. Finally be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes 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.

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've done everything to stand stand firm, then. With the belt of truth buckled around your waist. Paul is writing here, we know to the church in Ephesus, and we're at the end of his letter.

He's been writing while in prison, but not the typical imprisonment that you might imagine in chains. He's actually, uh, under house arrest, probably guarded by some Roman soldiers. And in his letter he writes instructions for living as part of the church and then goes on to write instructions for how to live in the Christian household.

And now at the end of year, he reminds us of the battle that's a foot all around us, a spiritual battle, not against some of the flesh and blood situations we've just walked through in the previous verses. These are bigger, wider, and more grand and far more complex than we can even comprehend. It sounds like maybe the Bible here is being cryptic with this spiritual warfare stuff.

But actually it's pretty straightforward. You see, you and I have minds of things on this earth and, and our context, our understanding, limited by space and time. And often we read the scripture and have these moments where we're kind of like, what in the world is this talking about here? Well, other worldly things are the things that it's talking about you and I don't know, but we get glimpses and, and small pictures into the realms beyond us.

John's visions in revelation. Um, give us a glimpse of heaven. And as you read it, man, we're not going to understand all of the pieces of what those things mean. We can't understand everything that is God. But we get a picture of how big and how other he is. Isaiah's prophetic visions. Uh, the big takeaway for me is God is so much greater and these realities are so far beyond my comprehension.

Man to think about all the different things that as God has presented, it just should blow our mind. And so when Paul says, there's this battle happening in a realm that we don't even know, we better go off course. There is this spiritual battle that's happening all around us is real. Uh, Warren weirs be, puts it this way.

Sooner or later, every believer discovers that the Christian life is a battleground, not a playground. And that he faces an enemy who is much stronger than he is apart from the Lord. And so we come to our text this morning in Ephesians chapter six verses 13 and 14 here, I'm going to read this portion again where it says, 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've done everything to stand stand firm, then with the belt of truth buckled around. Your waist. So the first question here is, what is the belt of truth? Might be a really great question to ask as we begin talking about the pieces of armor. What is it? Well, very simply put, it's the beginning, the foundation that all the other pieces of armor are connected to.

Jesus says this in John 14 six I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father. God, except. Through me and later in John 17 Jesus prays to God. Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth. And so kids, if you're sitting at home, and maybe you're trying to answer this question, what is the belt of truth?

The Sunday school answer oftentimes is correct. Jesus is truth. God's word is truth. And this is the belt that we are to wrap around us if we don't have the truth that is Christ and his word. Everything else is on shaky ground for we know that from the very beginning, Satan has stood in opposition to God and his creation.

Remember back in the garden of Eden, the question that was posed right at the beginning, uh, to Eve, did God really say, you will surely die. Satan coming into twist the truth that God has given to Adam and to Eve, and then later on as Satan was tempting Jesus in the wilderness after his 40 days without food.

He says, if you're really the son of God, turn this stone into bread. The temptation for Jesus to a cave, but Jesus combated that temptation with truth. Jesus lives, and he stands and he speaks the truth. We must believe in have him at the very center of our armor. And I think this kind of, uh, this, this answer also can correct the common misinterpretation of the armor and how it is supposed to be used.

In fact, it's God's armor given to us that are in Christ. It's not something that we muster up on our own. It's it's not a set of garments that we kind of take hold of and, and put on, and we can upgrade throughout life. These are given to us in Christ in full. God is in control and therefore Christ has defeated death.

And so we stand on him as the truth. That's a God's righteousness that's been given to us who are in Christ. He is truth and his word is true. We know that in Christ we've been given the righteous, perfect, straight a report card that Jesus earned, and we'll talk about this in the weeks ahead more about this, but I want to just share a couple of verses talking about this righteousness that we are wrapped in.

Romans four verse five it says, and to the one who does not work but believes in him, who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. Second Corinthians five 21 it says this, for our sake, he made him to be sin. Who knew no sin. That is Jesus. So that in Jesus, in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And in Galatians. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. And so what is the belt of truth? It's knowing where the defense against the attacks of the enemy begin Jesus and his word central to everything tied around us as a belt of truth.

All of their options are simply unable to wage war against these spiritual forces in this battle that is outside of our understanding. He is our truth, and we must be ready with him at our center, our core. Okay. And so the next question I would ask is, well, how do you Fasten this belt of truth around us?

Well, if we back up for a second here, we know that Paul was intentional about using the armor analogy. And this is a method that Jesus used all throughout the, uh, the gospels. And as he was teaching, he used things that were common that people understood, they knew so that he could teach them in a context that would make sense.

And so if we were to go a step further, also we would know that Paul used the image of armor because that's exactly what God used to describe himself in Isaiah chapter 11. Uh, there's this prophecy about the coming Messiah, the savior, the King who would have come with faithfulness tied around himself as a belt.

Isaiah chapter 59 verses 15 through 17. These are beautiful words, talking about the gracious God who saves. Listen to what it says here. Back in Isaiah, long before even Jesus came to earth, truth is nowhere to be found. And whoever shuns evil becomes a pray. The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice.

He saw that there was no one. He was appalled that there was no one to intervene. So his own arm achieved salvation for him and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate and the helmet of salvation on his head. He put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.

Man. These are beautiful words. Speaking about the Jesus that would one day come as our truth. And all this armor talk was something that God even originated long before Jesus came to worth. Paul also used this image of armor because the readers would have seen Roman soldiers all around in these parts, uh, dressed in, in battle armor.

And one of the first things that they would do, and actually literally the text says this, is that they would, uh, gird their loins. Dramatic pause. What in the world is girding your loins? Well, I would venture to say many of you have girded your loins before, uh, two options maybe that you've, you've used this before.

Um, if you've been a part of our church's living nativity. You know that you go up into the costume room. For those of you that are brave enough to put on a costume, uh, and you, you get a cloak and a tunic and an Abba. I'm not even really sure what all three of those pieces are. Maybe they're all the same, but one of them is longer.

One of them is shorter. And what happens? You go out and you go into your scene, you're in character, you're excited. And then immediately you're like, man, I really got to go to the bathroom. Okay, well you begin running because the groups are still coming all the way through. You gotta make it back to your scene.

So you start running to go inside, maybe grab a hot drink on the way and you trip and you fall because all of the things around your feet are trip you up, and you have to gather them and kind of hype them up in order to run so that you can move along faster. It's the very same thing. If you've seen women in dresses before, if they're running or if they have to go quickly across something, they'll gather a part of their dress so they can run and make their way quickly without tripping, tripping, or stepping on their dress.

These are the kinds of things that Paul is talking about here, that basically this belt of truth would gather the things up inside of us so that we could be ready for the battle. Basically, it would tie everything around their waist to get them ready to run. There was a story of a great battle in the past and this really clever general who told his men to go and to cut the belts of their enemy while they were sleeping the next morning.

The enemy troops were so busy holding up their trousers and all the things their guns were falling out because that was attached to their belt as well, that they weren't able to shoot their guns and therefore lost the battle. The belt is a very important part and it's the crux, the thing that holds it all together.

If we don't have truth, if there's no Christ in the equation, we don't have anything. And so Paul writes to his readers who would have seen and understood this, they would get it. The very first part of things is to have Christ as your foundation, to tie it all together, to ready yourself for battle, beginning with Jesus as our truth.

Okay. You probably are tracking with me. You get it. You have the whole idea of Jesus and his word are the truth. I know that the belt is a great comparison, not only because God describes himself in these terms with this armor, but also because Paul's readers would have understood the connection to armor they've seen on soldiers before.

But how do I know if I'm living with Jesus and his word as the truth, the belt of truth at my core. How is Jesus our truth, the foundation, the Homebase, the tie that holds it all together? While I would simply say this, we remember we surrender to that truth and to that Jesus, we make it our beginning of every decision all the time.

Our starting place, I believe in order to have the belt of truth firmly tied around your waist or to gird your loins is to give Jesus. The final say, Jesus and his word are the final say in all that we do. You see, Jesus must call the shots. The Christian life has always been about dependence, not autonomy.

And oftentimes the world would lobby for you to be an independent person, to live and to do all of your own things. And then we walk into this spiritual battle and we realize, man, I am so far out of my league. When we come back to the place of dependence, but that's what it's always been about. Many of you have enjoyed some time home during this quarantine with your family may be developing new rhythms and patterns, venturing into new things, playing some new games, teaching your kids different stuff.

And there's this certain age, actually, I feel like you never kind of grow out of this, uh, where you just have this desire for autonomy, right? A mom and dad, I know how to do it. When in my mind I'm thinking, well, gee, son or daughter, you've never done this before. How do you know how to do it already? It's not a learned or a taught thing.

It's actually just innate inside of us. I recently found myself in a very dark place. It's a process I wouldn't wish on even my worst of enemies. You may know the process that I speak about. In fact, there are certain places, actually large store houses filled with these unending torturous devices. And you may know what I'm talking about.

It is the assemble at home piece of furniture, furniture or, or project or or something. And so you take the big boxes, you bring them home, you get out the manual, and you begin. And there are no words, just pictures. And most times completely unhelpful. Now, if you've ever been to Ikea, you probably have seen something like this with this guy with a really pointy nose or pointy head.

I'm not really sure, and he's doing all these things. There's Xs, there's diagrams, and the whole thing makes a lot of no sense. But as you continue along, you realize. Um, that, uh, you're unwrapping about 15,000 screws. There are washers, there are lock washers, there are cam locks bolts. And yes, they even come with the tools needed to put all this together, the Allen wrench, the size of your pinky.

And so you begin step one, step two, step two, a step two B, and so on and so forth. And quickly this week, I hit my stride working through this. Thankfully, it was not one of those torturous Ikea put together manuals. If someone had asked me at this time, if I wanted to do this, putting together a furniture creation full time, I probably in my poor, misguided overconfidence self may have agreed to the challenge.

Step three, step four. The paper is slowly moving farther and farther away out of sight, and I am moving into autonomous building. I know the plans, I know what's next and I run ahead. And invariably, you know what happens? You come out of a very difficult number of steps with a door that swings the wrong direction and about 27 additional parts that you have no idea.

You can't even fathom where you would have put them into place. Man, you see, autonomy is not something that we learn. It's just innate inside of us. It's hard wired into who we are as people broken, sinful. Following and allowing Jesus to be our belt of truth is, is like this. It's, it's like a salmon swimming in the wrong direction.

What our body and our, our minds and our hearts want to do is not to surrender. It's to take control of our lives. It's backwards. That seems difficult and it's the work of the spirit of truth inside of us that makes it possible. Friends, this is the Christian life. This release. You see when autonomy wins, here is how it plays out.

I decide how I spend my money as the chief financial officer of my life. I determine how to raise my children as King of my kingdom. I call the shots for my career decisions. I choose the person I want to date or to marry. I satisfy my needs with one I want as my personal concierge. I do what I want when I want and go ahead and try to stop me.

This is the goal of the enemy. The spiritual battle is to continue removing the guiding truth in our life. Keep your desires at the center of your life. This is the twisting of truth. And so we come to the God who says, I am truth. My word is truth. And we find that if we allowed him to be our belts of truth and the Lord of my life, here's what it may look like, and all my resources are his God.

How can we as a family, how can I as an individual honor you with the money you've entrusted. To me, God, you've given me these children. You've blessed me with them. How might we honor you as a family and raising them? God, my ability, my skill, my makeup, they're from you. You've given me these gifts. How can I honor you in my workplace?

God, while you've given me preferences and tastes, I want you to call the shots in my relationships, not simply my passions and my desires. God. You say that, you know what I need even before I ask, I will trust you to provide, to satisfy into a pulled me. God, what do you want? Where will you lead me? I am listening.

This is a life wrapped in truth. I want to wrap things up this morning with us. A few key application questions, uh, as we think about keeping Jesus. As the center of our lives, the truth, and these are some good questions that we ought to ask in order to know that we are keeping him as the center. The first one is this, does it honor Christ as Lord?

In first Peter three 15 it says, Revere Christ in your hearts as Lord. The second question would be, this. Does what I'm about to do does all of this that I'm about here help me flee from temptation and from sin. Second Timothy two 22 says, flee the evil desires of our youth, the lusts and the passions that guide us.

The third question would be, this, is this drawing me to love and worship Jesus more? Philippians four eight we're reminded that whatever is true, whatever is right. If it's pure and lovely, excellent and praise worthy. Think about these things. The fourth question would be this, will others love and praise Christ more through what I say and what I do?

Matthew five 16 says, let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and praise and glorify your father who is in heaven. Question five. Am I leaning on my own understanding? I had a recent decision that I was making and I was talking with my father in law and um, I got to the end of kind of where I had, you know, reasoned and thought all these things, and he gently said to me as only Ralph can do.

And he said, that would all be really true and great if you were leaning on your own. Understanding and man, that was a like a shot to my gut that I just thought, man, I've, I've taken this with my own brain and my own understanding as far as I can, but now Christ, what do you want for me, for my family?

These are questions I believe that can help us stay on the path of keeping Christ central in our lives. For those that are in Christ, the armor is given to us in full. And it's Christ in his truth. So we're going to continue our time this morning with, uh, what a beautiful opportunity, um, to take communion together.

And, and the church has always been about doing this gathering together, but as you know, we are not together. We're separated, we're apart. And so we want to join around Christ this morning. As you're watching, we hope you'll engage with the members of your family in taking communion this morning. I want to read, uh, in Matthew chapter 26 verses 26 through 28

now, as they were eating, Jesus took bread and after blessing it, broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, take, eat. This is my body. And he took a cup. And when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, drink of it. All of you for this is the blood in my covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Now I want to say this, if you were here on a Sunday morning in the building, a great and important part of communion would be the gathered together part, the whole body coming together that we could as one unit join and remember Christ. But the very best part we read here can be achieved right at our own homes.

It is remembering, it is surrendering to Christ and it is examining our hearts as we read in first Corinthians 1128 let a person examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup that we will are to offer our hearts to him and say, God, what would you have in this situation? This wrong or this sin that I've committed.

What would you tell me to do in making this right? How can I, again, surrender to you? And so we gather these elements for those that have trusted Jesus as their savior to remember how they began in their salvation. So let's take a minute to examine or investigate. Surrender again, our hearts to the Lord, and I just want to say this, this is a really special time because we've been around our families a lot these days, and maybe a real special moment could even be that the time of examining our hearts could practically end in the repair of relationship sitting far apart on the couch.

It could be the forgiveness asked for. To the children that you've sinned against, or children to your parents. It could even be a pause button and a FaceTime call to someone that you've wronged in the past, and we have the opportunity, let's use it in a really special way to examine our hearts. So we'll do that now together.

Lord, we're thankful that you sent your son Jesus the truth, the way the life to come and pay for our brokenness, our sin on the cross, his body broken. Bruised and crushed, and Lord, it was your pleasure to do that to your son, that many would come to know you, that their sins would be washed away, that their life would be made new, and that the righteousness of Christ would be given to them.

We remember this morning, we pray these things in your name. Amen. So here's where we get earthy because Hey, I'm at the church, but I actually brought some communion supplies from my own home this morning. I got my piece of bread here cause that's all we had at our house. And, and I have some juice here in a little bottle.

And so, uh, we're going to remember as we consume these two elements, um, that we are here to remember who Christ is, his body broken. For us. And so with your family, maybe just you at home and you can join with me as we take and eat of the bread, doing this in remembrance of the broken body of Christ.

it says, and he took the cup when he had given thanks. He gave it to them saying, drink of it. All of you for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sentence. What a great promise it is that Jesus, just before he would go to the cross, said, I'm going, my blood is going to be poured out.

And every time you eat and drink, do this. Remembering the beauty and the joy that comes because of my sacrifice for you, my love for you. God. We're so thankful that we can gather in this nontraditional way. We're joining our hearts around a truth that is, uh, to remember to, to hold high your grace and your love.

I mean so much, Lord, that we can even, uh, take this cup and drink in remembrance of your shed blood on the cross. We pray these things in your name. Amen. Go ahead and drink of the cup membering Christ's blood poured out for you.

gotta be long together. But in our physical separation, we rejoin with you, Jesus in our hearts. We gather as we are able virtually and ask you, continue to teach us appropriate ways to engage, to be with. Thank you, Lord, for the opportunity to remember your broken body and your shed blood as families, as individuals, maybe even sharing that.

Um, just in spirit. With knowing that many others are even watching online and gathering around the remembered Christ this morning. Thank you for this truth, this promise. We love you Lord, and we pray these things in your name. Amen. Have a great week.