

PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD, THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST THE SCHEMES OF THE DEVIL.

Well, it's back to school time. And, everybody knows what that means, right? Time for the "What I did on my summer vacation" essay. And I know enquiring minds are dying to know what pastor did on his summer vacation, so I'm going to tell you. Went to my son's graduation, watched him become a doctor . Set foot -- quite literally -- on the tundra of Lambeau Stadium, home of the 13X world champion Green Bay Packers. Went hiking, among other places, in the Black Hills and West Virginia. Went fishing in Canada. And just to make sure it wasn't all work and no play, did a little golfing.

And, I met the man, the legend -- Dan Gable. In case you're wondering -- that is a Olympic gold medal. Dan Gable is a living legend; fair to say, he is the face of wrestling in America. He won championships in high school and college, and then won a gold medal in the 1972 Olympic games, where he never gave up a single point to any opponent. Then, he became a legend as the coach of the University of Iowa wrestling team.

I don't mean to bore you with a bunch of facts. I'm not just name dropping to impress you. I just thought I should explain who Dan Gable was because wrestling, even though it is the greatest sport in the history of mankind, has some things that we maybe just don't understand.

Take the uniform. We get the headgear, so you don't get cauliflower ear. But the singlet? The rules say it must cover the wrestler's torso, and the inseam can be no more than 4-inches long, but cannot go below the knee. How is that going to protect you from the guy coming at you? But it

could even be worse. Have you ever seen what a sumo wrestler wears? That “thing” is called a mawashi and I don’t get how that is supposed to protect you. How about professional wrestling? I mean, are leopard print tights and a feather boa really meant to protect you from your opponent?

Do you see what I’m saying? It would appear to us that a wrestler should wear more equipment to protect themselves when an opponent comes flying at them, especially when we hear Paul’s words this morning,

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

In the Christian faith and life, we do not even wrestle against a human opponent. We wrestle against the devil, the forces of hell, and everyone else who denies Jesus and makes themselves an enemy of the Christian Church.

And those opponents come at you and they don’t come with traditional wrestling moves -- the half-nelson, the cradle, the double leg takedown. They come at you with “flaming darts”.

There you are sitting around -- reading the paper, having coffee with friends, in the boat waiting for a walleye to bite, doing your homework -- doing the things you do, and woof!, here comes a flaming dart from the father of all lies, tempting you to sin, to doubt your faith, to cause you all manner of distress, heartache, problems.

The reason that the devil comes at you like this is because he is a liar and a murderer from the beginning. He is bent on your destruction and will do whatever he can to destroy you. He hates you as much as he hates Jesus, and he will take his anger out on you again and again, and again, and again, coming at your body, your soul, your mind with his flaming darts.

Do you really think a singlet, a mawashi, a feather boa will protect you from those flaming darts? Paul tells us what to do in our battle with the devil, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." There's a uniform for wrestling.

It starts with the belt of truth. When you put the bolt of truth on, you are girded with the truth that Jesus is your Savior, your Protector, your Friend and no one can snatch you out of His hand. That belt reads like this,

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Then comes the breastplate of righteousness that protects your heart, your body, your soul. There is no better protection against the wiles and schemes, the flaming darts, of the devil because that is the righteousness of Christ Himself, who went to the cross for you to protect you from all the devil's attacks.

And of course if you are going to stand firm against the flaming darts of the devil, you have to have the right footwear -- the shoes of the Gospel of peace. Those shoes are made from things like the nails and the crown of thorns and the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. These are the shoes that allow you to stand firm in the peace of Jesus Christ, so that no matter what flaming darts the devil throws at you, you cannot be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus. You can stand firm in Christ.

After that, you have the helmet of salvation that protects your whole head, your mind, your ears, your eyes, your mouth, so that when the devil

comes, wanting to bring you down, tempting you, wanting you to question the Word of God, that helmet protects you so that you may believe with your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is your Savior.

You are even able to strike back against the devil when he comes with the sword of Spirit, which is the Word of God. We see how that works when Jesus was in the wilderness. For 40 days and 40 nights, he was fasting and the devil came with all his flaming darts to get Jesus to doubt, to keep Him from going to the cross. And what does Jesus do when he hears all the devil's lies? He says, "It is written..." He takes the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God and strikes the devil down.

That's the Word God has given to you, that Word you hear, you learn, that dwells in you. That's the Word that you use to make Satan flee from you with all of his lies. You know the hymn, "One little word can fell him."

So are you starting to see what a great outfit this is, the whole armor of God? It was made by Jesus who wrestled the devil in the wilderness for you; made by Jesus who took the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God, and cut down the devil in the wilderness and on the cross; made by Jesus who gave His whole body into death upon that cross to bring about your salvation, your victory over sin, death, and the devil. Because Jesus went to the cross, the devil is done. His head is crushed. His accusations are silenced. You are forgiven. You have peace with God.

He gave you the whole armor of God when you were baptized, so that you really have put on the whole armor of God. And each and every day, by daily repentance, you once again put on the whole armor of God. And dressed in that armor, you can stand against the flaming darts of the enemies, against his schemes, against his lies, or whatever he brings against you. Dressed in that, you can't lose!