**Put on all the armour that God gives you** (Ephesians 6.11)

Warfare has an interesting history. Fighting began with fists, then clubs, to weapons that cut through skin like swords (firstly copper, then bronze and iron), and ones that were projected, eg stones, spears and arrows. To combat these soldiers devised all manner of armour, protecting the chest and head, then legs and back, made from leather, metal plate, chain links. When weapons became guns and cannons, slowly all this armour disappeared as useless, until tanks came along. For the ordinary soldier armour became camouflage and weapons threatened to be mass-destruction. Paul could not have imagined all this so his armour was related to Roman armies. TEXT.

NB. In the old days of the Roman republic, armour and weapons was the responsibility of the individual soldier; by Paul’s day the state provided these. For us also our armour and weapons are not that which we have to find and develop; they are given us by God.

Christians today are often reluctant to use military sounding metaphors in hymns: when was the last time you sang Onward Christian Soldiers, Fight the God Fight, Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus, etc? We feel this being military is counter-productive to Kingdom of God in a world ravaged by warfare.

But as Paul points out the enemy for a Christian is not ultimately human, and not engaged in ordinary warfare, but is a spiritual enemy and warfare. Hence v14-17: truth = belt, righteousness (=right standing with God) = breastplate, readiness = shoes, faith = shield, salvation = helmet, word of God = sword.

Easy to try to explain each parallel in detail, but a little fruitless, but it is clearly good to have truth, etc.

We would have to say that our fight is against spiritual darkness, not individual people. But is it against wonky religious ideologies, and intolerance?

Overall it is a battle of the power of love over hatred; bridge building over wall building.

This last couple of weeks Taliban has taken over Afghanistan and now proclaims peace, but only through force. When peace comes through force you are rightly suspicious. God’s peace comes differently.

Covid 19 has inspired a different kind of warfare. Not one using conventional weapons, not even using vaccinations but a fight against rampant individualism, selfishness. Victory comes when we act together, using the weapons of social distancing, mask-wearing, willingness to be vaccinated, care for neighbours.

We have seen what happens when people think the rules don’t apply to them, or that others can be vaccinated but not them, and we see this in NZ even today. Let us stay strong together as we face another Lockdown, trusting that our weapons of love and community are stronger than hatred, distrust and rampant individualism.