

Sunday 26th August 2018, 14th after Pentecost. Canongate Kirk.

Ephesians 6:10 *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.*

Ironically there are no fireworks tonight – there were plenty last night for the end of the Tattoo and there will be plenty more tomorrow night with the traditional fireworks concert marking the end of the whole Festival for another year, but there will be no fireworks tonight. And this week there is a chance that the city centre itself will be a little more quiet than it has been of late. But as those of us who live and work here on the Royal Mile have come to know only too well, the end of the Festival does not mean the end of the tourist season by any stretch of the imagination. The Festival coming to an end does in fact coincide though with the conclusion of our recent series of extracts from St Paul’s letter to the Ephesians over the last few Sundays, the letter sent to the Christian community in Ephesus, a busy bustling noisy melting pot of a place that can be so appropriately compared to our own city in the month of August. In previous reflections on those extracts I’ve suggested that St Paul is advocating a very different way of life to that with which the Christian congregations in Ephesus find themselves surrounded, a different way of living and loving and believing to set them apart from the chaos all around. And as the letter now comes towards its end there is no suggestion of life quietening down, of the challenge easing, of the difficulties and distractions becoming any less. *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power* St Paul writes as he takes his leave of his readers then and now, urging them and us to stand firm in that same strength. His reference to himself as “an ambassador in chains” reminds us that this letter was written in prison in Rome, and just as in previous chapters he has drawn on the context in which the Christians in Ephesus are struggling to establish themselves, so now he draws on the context in which he himself is languishing to find inspiration for one of his most famous illustrations, the armour of God, the whole armour of God, as he puts it. *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.* Put on the whole armour of God, he continues, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. I don’t suppose Paul would see many people from his prison cell, he probably had no window at all and he would rely on whatever interaction he could get from the soldiers who guarded him and presumably fed him, and fed him here unknowingly with the different elements of the armour of God, coming and going as they did in their boots and their belts and their breastplates, with their shield and their sword and their helmet. These are the things that Paul takes from his own surroundings, from his own constrained interaction with a hostile world, and turns them into something positive to leave with the Ephesians, something powerful to encourage and to enable them in all their battles to come. The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit. They’re all part of the Roman soldier’s protective armour, all intended to defend him in different ways against different dangers. And now they’re part of every Christian believer’s armour too, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil and the ways of the world.

*Soldiers of Christ arise and put your armour on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies through his eternal Son;
strong in the Lord of hosts, and in his mighty power;
who in the strength of Jesus trusts is more than conqueror.*

Finally, even as it all comes to an end and the very last firework scatters and bursts and fades, *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.* And now may God bless to us this preaching of his most holy word, and to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all praise and glory now and forever. Amen.