

God provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day.

Before long seventh and eighth graders will be reciting these words from the catechism. God provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day.

For children it is just that simple. But one day they too will wake up and find they have a boss that demands more and more and more. More hours, harder work, less rest, more responsibility. More forms to fill out, papers to shuffle, more people to be shaped by the bottom line. People who have to be told they are no longer working there, customers who are offered less service, pressure to cut your benefits even as years of service should make you more valuable.

Conflict. Dedication that is ignored. Special effort that goes unnoticed. And always work added on top of the work. God may provide the blessing of daily work as we once learned in the catechism, but often it is nearly impossible to see his hand in a job that drains everything from us.

So many people I talk to tell me they are being stretched by the demands of their lives. Pulled more and more, thinner and thinner, demands tug from every direction.

To all of us this word from God comes to us: Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authroitites, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

The devil is God's ape, Luther wrote. Evil takes the good gifts of God and bends them and distorts them until homes God has provided for the care and protection of children, become the place of their abuse,

governments intended by God to guard people from violence and oppression become the means of injustice and oppression. And daily work, a gift and a blessing of God becomes a burden that destroys.

The devil is God's ape. He imitates the good. That a ^{person} ~~man~~ would ^{be} dedicate ^{her work, to his} himself to his work is good. That a business would show a profit, providing a needed service in society and jobs that feed many families, that is good. ^{work} ~~That a work place~~ would be efficient is good.

But when the demands of work leave fathers absent from their families, when the demands of work mean that a mother has no energy to listen to her children, when the demands of work mean home is chaos, then what God has provided for good has become the source of evil.

Look at your life. Are God's blessings, his goodness, shining through to you? Or have weariness, exhaustion, being stretched left you vulnerable to God's enemies?

A battle is being fought over you. Who will own your heart, your ^{deeds} life, your eternity? Will you belong to God, or will you be ruled by every spirit of these times, of this age?

Our second lesson says: Take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet ^{put} on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.

If you think it is more than you can to to stand firm in the midst of a life that demands and demands and demands, you are right. If you think that it is more than you can do to live as if life has meaning in an age that declare that only the happiness of this moment has meaning, then you

are right. If you think that it is more than you can do to give when everything you have and are is being taken from you, you are right. It is more than you can do.

But not more than God can do. Putting on the armor of God is to count on him. To let the Lord be your strength, your wisdom, your confidence.

Sometimes people talk as if you can't take the Lord to work. The truth is that we cannot go to work without him. For if we do then the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places will have their way, if not with us, then with our neighbor.

So how do we put on this armor of God? Through prayer, through reading the scriptures, through hearing his word and sharing his supper, through study with other Christians. Next week through our Sunday School program and Confirmation program that begin another year, we will be equipping the people of God with this armor. So equipped we will find that in our schools and in our work and in our homes, that our Lord will have his way with us, and make us a blessing for all around us.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Amen.