

Ser-mini for Pride Sunday (22Aug21)
Eph6:10-20; John6:56-69

One of my grandpa's favorite hymns was "Onward Christian Soldiers." He lived during an era of Christendom.

The last of our hymnals it was in came out in 1958. A middle verse begins "Like a mighty army moves the church of God; brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod." Not only is it male-centered and militaristic, but seems over-confident in our cause, in how right we are to conquer others.

It's not the only bombastic hymn; I looked up our Ephesians reference in the United Methodist hymnal and also found lyrics like "Soldiers of Christ, arise, and put your armor on, strong in the strength which God supplies thru (sic!) his (sic sic!) eternal Son...from strength to strength go on, wrestle and fight and pray, tread all the powers of darkness down and win the well-fought day" (#513) Or this one: "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, the strife will not be long; this day the noise of battle, the next the victor's song. Put on the gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer; where duty calls or danger, be never wanting there" (#514).

On Pride Sunday, we have to confess that—misjudging evil and misrepresenting our Lord—the forces of the church too often have been weaponized against LGBTQ people and those oppressed for other reasons. If Ephesians is about armor we should pray for protection for such vulnerable folks, including from the church's violence.

But what after defense? Is there fighting back? Well, Poet Audre Lord, speaking for those "who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older," declared "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never...bring about genuine change."**

So Ched Myers, whom I referenced when we started Ephesians, asks an obvious question: Do military metaphors contradict work for peace and

justice? I'd say yes. Yet he calls this Ephesians passage an ironic "nonviolent call to arms" in the struggle for change.*



This 20-year-old pair of Chuck Taylors may be a response to that call. I had written on the bottom "Ephesians 6:15," referencing the verse "as shoes for your feet, put on whatever enables you to proclaim the Gospel of peace." I don't know if Chuck Taylors dismantle the master's house in service to change for peace and justice. That's likely too much confidence to put in beat-up footwear anyway. For this Pride Sunday, again ironically, I personally need to stand less proud and more humbly.

So I'll throw in my stock with Simon Peter, asking, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." It isn't in my self-assuredness to fight others who are wrong. It's not a charge leading a righteous army. That seems unlikely to dismantle anything. Instead, with humility at our failures, not taking life but sharing the life we're all given, the church at heart is simply the community who trusts in the one with the words of eternal life, words not just for insiders, but for all of God's beloveds.

I've got shoes for my feet. And for the peaceful words of my mouth, rather than Onward, Christian Soldiers, I'll share the grace-filled "I received the living God, and my heart is full of joy." That's a worthwhile message to get behind.

Hymn: "I Received the Living God" (ELW 477)

** https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Lorde_The_Masters_Tools.pdf

* *Ambassadors of Reconciliation Volume 1: New Testament Reflections on Restorative Justice and Peacemaking*, Ched Myers & Elaine Enns, p111, 107