

Pentecost 14, Proper 16  
St. Paul's/Resurrección, Mount Vernon, WA

August 25, 2024  
Rev. Paul Moore

## **A Sermon for Students going back to School**

If I were going to build a fire right here, what would I need? I would need several things: Matches, or some source of flame, firewood, or something that burns, clear space around the fire so it doesn't get out of hand, possibly a bucket of water in case things get out of hand, and certainly, permission from the Park!

If I were to prepare for school, what would I need? Clothes, maybe new shoes, or maybe a new hair style, but one thing is absolutely necessary, a backpack. What are you going to put in your backpack? There are really two backpacks you will take to school. One is your physical backpack that you will put your school things in. The other is the backpack of your heart. That's the one I want to talk to you about today. What are you going to put in the backpack of your heart?

Our second lesson today talks about several things that can help us know what to have in the backpack of our hearts. It describes parts of a Roman soldier's armor, but it can help us get ready for school, too. Here they are:

**A Belt of Truth:** What do you like to learn about? How do you go about learning those things? How about things you need to know but don't know you need to know them? School is for learning. The Belt of Truth is your desire to learn, to know the truth so that you can live well.

**A Breastplate of Righteousness:** The breastplate in Roman armor protected a soldier's heart. At school, it's important to protect your heart. What are ways that your heart gets hurt at school? What can you do to protect your heart? The most important thing to remember is that, whatever people say, or whatever happens, God loves you, and so do a whole lot of other people. That love is like a protective shield. When your heart is safe you will know what to do and say so that you can live well.

**Shoes for peace:** Do you remember the last time there was a fight at your school? I hope you weren't in it! What was it about? Was someone insulted? Did someone not belong? Or was it over something more important, like how people are treated and which people get left out? You can't learn and you can't keep your heart safe if you don't walk in the way of peace. Walk away from fights--it's the smartest, and the hardest thing to do. Find ways to get along. Don't let your feelings get hurt quickly. Forgive other people who do unkind things to you. Make sure everyone has a chance to be part of the good things

going on. When you do these things, you live well.

A Shield of faith: You may not think so, but I know so. Your teachers really are on your side. They could make a whole lot more money doing something else, but they chose to become a teacher because they want to make a difference in the lives of kids. So, trust them. Do what they ask you to do. If you think they are asking you to do something unfair or wrong, talk respectfully with them about it. Maybe you don't fully understand what is going on. Keep faith in your teachers and you will live well.

A Helmet of Salvation: Salvation means being brought to a good place. What do you have to do so that when you get to school you are in a good place? The first thing is a good breakfast. The second thing is to have all your homework done the best you can. The third thing is to get there on time ready to learn. Protect your head—be prepared for school and you will live well.

A Sword of the Spirit: The sword is the only thing in this list that is not defensive, protective. It's what you use to make a difference in your day and in your school. A sword cuts through your enemies and defeats them. But, remember, your real enemies are never other people. They are all the ways your attitudes and your thoughts trip you up and ruin things, attitudes like being angry at the world just because, being depressed and sad all the time, or lacking confidence in yourself and others. There is one attitude that destroys all of them in one swipe. Be grateful.

I go to Honduras every year. We help kids go to school who live far away from the schools. Some of them walk an hour each way to get to school and home again. Some of them have to catch busses or hitch rides with people. They do it because they are so grateful that they get to go to school. Otherwise, they would have to work in the fields, earning about a dollar a day, living in real poverty like nothing you ever see around here. Education is the key to a good life for them.

It is for you, too, so be grateful that you have a school to go to, teachers that care, and important things to learn. An attitude of gratitude is your sword that clears the way for you to live well.

Today we give thanks for backpacks. Please bring all of them here and lay them on the floor in front of me. Each of you stand by your backpack. If you don't have one, we have one for you. All the rest of you, extend your hand in blessing toward these kids.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, we lift to you today, these students. They stand here ready to receive your

blessings and they commit themselves to study and learning in the school year ahead. We ask your blessing on each of them. Further, we ask your blessing on these backpacks. They will hold the school work of each student and will be carried from home to school and back again. As these students carry these backpacks, may they be reminded of the love and care of this congregation that surrounds them each school day. We pray as well for the teachers and administrators in our schools. May they also be sustained by your blessing. May they be reminded that this congregation embraces their call to teaching and learning and surrounds them with love and care as well. We pray in the name of Jesus who we seek to follow day by day. **Amen.**<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Borrowed from: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-blessing-of-the-backpacks-and-the-school-year>