

The Armour of God: The Boots of Peace

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Lent Series 2022 Armour of God, Baptisms, Lord's Supper

Ephesians 6:15

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Ephesians 2:11-22

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)— ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Eph 6:11-15

The Armor of God

¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Beloved people of God,

My own “work boots” are basically what many of you might consider your casual evening, going-out shoes or maybe your Sunday shoes. But I wanted to draw some inspiration from work boots. And since we've referenced the armour of a firefighter over the past weeks, look with me now at these firefighter's boots.

We all have different requirements for our workwear. Thank you for bringing yours up here. We have a vast array of people from different workplaces and careers. And some of you brought your favourite shoes. Even if brought your high heels or fancies shoes, they are designed for specific purposes, often for occasions other than work.

This firefighter's boot is special on several levels. It has a composite toe and bottom. So, it's like a steel-toe safety boot but it's not cold like steel. Nonetheless, it protects firefighters from things that might fall on their feet or sharp object they might step on when they enter into places they aren't familiar with; places that are often filled with smoke where they can't see where they are stepping. In addition, these boots are heat proof since firefighters go into burning buildings! And, according to the manufacturer's label, they are made of special material or treated with special products so that they are able to resist chemical spills which firefighters also face with from time to time.

The Boots of a Roman Soldier

From his prison in Rome, the Apostle Paul wrote the Church in Ephesus. Paul talks about the Armour of God for the Christian, taking some inspiration from the soldier posted by his door. So, let's think about the soldier's boot from that era. The soldier's footwear could be more like sandals that were firmly attached with leather straps around your ankle. Some were covered in metal, like a breastplate, in order to protect the foot from spears and arrows. But the most important part of the soldier's footwear was on the bottom. Their boots, shoes or sandals had cleats or spikes on the bottom. Think of your soccer cleats or golf shoes or even the ice-grippers you might strap on the bottom of your winter boots to keep you from slipping when you go for a winter walk or hike.

More than protecting you from falling objects, these soldier's boot helped him stand. They helped him keep his footing in battle. You can imagine with all the armour a soldier had, particularly the stuff on his body, if he fell down, it would be hard to get back up. And, while down, you are much more vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy. So, these spike-bottom boots help keep the soldier's feet firmly planted on the ground. They help him stay upright. They aren't part of the armour they necessarily would think about as providing protection. But if this footwear comes loose, soldiers quickly realize how important these boots are to keeping you upright and therefore standing strong in battle.

The Boots of Peace

Now, what does Paul say about boots for the Christian?

Eph 6:14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

"Feet-fitted" speaks to shoes, boots or sandals. You need the right size fit and the right kind of boot for the job. For the soldier, he needs good footwear to do his job well. He needs boots suited to the job and sized for his own feet. In a similar way,

Paul is saying that our boots of peace are the right footwear to help us get the job done better. They will keep us safer as well as improving our performance.

So, the Lord tells us as his soldiers to stand firm in our boots of peace. Just like we've seen with the previous pieces of the Armour of God, there's gift side to this piece and an action side.

The Boots Fitted in Christ

First of all, the gift of peace is what we receive freely through Christ. This peace is ours. It's a gift from God to all who believe in Jesus. But think of all the battles we face in life that try to steal the peace that is ours in Christ. All the ways in which Satan tries to shake us from holding on to the assurance of our righteousness in Christ, the comfort of the truth that our sin is fully paid for.

I've told you not so long ago about the time in my youth when I doubted that Christ's finished work was for my sin too. I felt so bad about what I'd done wrong. It is in those times that we don't have peace. Our heart is troubled and uncertain, concerned and worried. There is no peace. Just unrest. The gift of Christ's peace seems far away. It's not that our salvation is really in question from God's side. He has us securely in his hands. But we lack the peace of Christ that is ours because we are allowing Satan to discourage us and cause doubts.

When it comes to our relationship with other people, there are also times when peace seems far removed. I've had plenty of times in ministry where peace seemed in short supply. Yes, sometimes people get upset, unreasonable and even hostile because of a disagreement on some issue. It's hard to feel peace in those circumstances. I've had times when I couldn't sleep well due to tensions I've felt with people or tensions someone told me about and asked me to help them fix. Most of you know what I'm talking about, except the people who cause the tension 😊. Seriously, we all feel tensions with others at some time or another. Satan tries to cause dissension between Christians and sometimes he brings in outside opposition. We are all victims of sin and we participate in sin as well by allowing tensions to fester and grow. Differences accentuate how we all can be judgmental of one another, proud and even hateful at times.

The Church in Ephesus had this kind of tensions as well. Paul addresses the division between Gentiles and Jews. Jews thought that Gentiles were inferior or second-class citizens in the church. Why? Just because they weren't Jews. That's it. They had a saying back then: "Ya ain't much if you ain't Jewish!" Some of you may have heard a similar one. But that sentiment has no place in the church. As humans, we love highlighting divisions because they make us feel good about ourselves! We—sinfully—like to exalt ourselves by putting others down. In its worst forms, it looks like Hitler saying Jews are inferior. Whites saying black people are a lower species. The Russian president thinking Ukrainians are not worthy of living. But it's closer to home too. The vaccinated looking down on the unvaxed and visa versa. The rich looking down on the poor. The heterosexual looking down on the

homosexual. The old looking down on the young or young looking down on old. Even Christians looking down on “sinful” non-Christians.

To combat that sin in ourselves, we must slip on the boots of peace which are earned for us in Christ and fitted for us by him.

Peace is a gift of God for us in Christ. That’s why the boots are fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. The gospel is the good news of salvation for everyone in Christ. Peace comes when we know all is well. The old hymn “When Peace like a River” has that powerful refrain, “It is well, it is well with my soul!” We need that peace that all is well between us and God. Peace like a river gives the sense that it keeps on flowing. It keeps coming and refreshing us. This third piece of armour once again reminds us of our secure position in Christ, one we can stand firmly on whenever Satan or our doubts tell us we’re unworthy! We can trust completely in Jesus’ saving work. There is no one righteous, says Paul. But through faith in Jesus, we are declared righteous, now and forever at peace with God!

Then the peace of Christ we have helps us step forward in that unshakable comfort. We plant our feet down with spikes on our boots because we don’t want to give up any ground to the devil on this score. We stand on the work of Christ for us. And that helps us battle the way we look down on ourselves for our sinfulness or also how we look down on anyone else.

What did Paul write in Ephesians 2 about this? Speaking first to the Gentiles in the Church of Ephesus—but very much expecting the Jews to hear it as well—he says, formerly you Gentiles were excluded from the covenants of God’s promises. You were without hope and without God in this world (2:12). But now you’re brought near to God in Christ. Then he adds this about Jesus—and listen for all the talk of peace:

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups [Gentiles and Jews] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Jesus is the reason for our personal peace with God, regardless of our nationality or anything else. And Jesus is the reason for our peace with one another! Peace is a big deal. Jesus through his death on the cross, says Paul, put our hostilities to death. There’s no reason for thinking one is better than the other when we are equally in need of God’s saving grace, equally offered new life through Jesus who died in our place, equally brought into God’s covenant family and embrace. No one is more worthy than another, nor more unworthy. We are all reconciled into one body through the cross, says Paul. This is what we celebrate in baptism. It’s why a baby that hasn’t done anything is marked with the sign of God’s

covenant to be faithful to them. It's why we celebrate the Lord's Supper to remember what Jesus has done for each one of us, how he died for our sins and makes us one people, regardless of our different sins and our varied backgrounds. We all have our boots of peace fitted in Christ and readied by Christ so that we can serve well in his name as one body.

Get On Your Boots—You're Readied

So how do we respond to this? How do we put on our boots of peace? What does it look like when Christians armour-up with our boots of peace?

We seek to be peacemakers. We've been readied to be peacemakers.

We, first of all, want people to know the peace of Christ with which we've been gifted. Sometimes we'll be given the opportunity to tell people about Jesus and the peace with God that we enjoy through Jesus' saving work for us. But most often we'll be a living example of the peace of Christ. Remember, the spikes on the boots helped the Roman soldier stand his ground in battle. The gift of the boots of peace likewise helps us stand surefooted and readied in our world today. We stand in the face of opposition today in the confidence that Jesus is our peace. In Jesus, we have peace with God and in Jesus we have no need to fear the enemies—in whatever form they come. Instead, we go forward as peacemakers fitted with our boots of peace.

Jesus faced opponents with truth and grace. He exuded peace in the face of the Sanhedrin's false accusation. In the face of Herod's and Pilate's kangaroo courts, he did not succumb to fear but was steadfast and peaceful because he knew he was on the side of God, of truth and of righteousness.

Today, we also stand in peace. We stand on the solid ground of our position in Christ. Nothing can take that away. And that confidence moves us to love and embrace people of all different stripes. We don't look down on anyone because we're all the same before God. We're all equally in need of salvation, regardless of any difference we ascribe to one another in this world. Paul called Gentiles and Jews to be one—at peace with one another—in this world and especially in the Church of Jesus Christ and for the sake of the world.

So, let me ask you, where do you wear your boots that you brought to church this morning? I've purposely asked you to bring your "work boots" because I don't want you think that being a peacemaker is something you need to add on to your already busy schedule. You don't need to go out in the evening after your workday in order to practice being a peacemaker.

I don't pretend to know the job of a firefighter inside and out. But from where I stand, I can see a firefighter being an agent of peace by showing no discrimination. When you find a person in need, you treat them with all your skills and resources. You don't say, "Oh man, another drug addict. He's not worth saving!" You look with love on that person and recognize him or her as a broken

image-bearer of God. A person full of pain and in need of redemption. You do your utmost to be a peacemaker who treats all people equally, no matter who they are or how they ended up where they are.

The same could be said for people working in hospitals or other places where people are being cared for. With your soft-bottom shoes, you need to meet hurting people with an equally soft-hearted touch, seeking to bring some peace to their lives at a very troubled time.

The peace-filled tradesman wears steel toe boots to work each day. He sees the importance of doing his best to help people enjoy their homes. We all know the struggle of a furnace breaking down in the middle of winter or the toilet backing up unexpectedly. We know the frustration of finding out that our home was not built to code. These problems can be remedied by someone in the trades who sees it as their job to help alleviate all the brokenness of our homes so that people can live peacefully, not having to be stressed out by crooked or shoddy workers or workmanship.

Teachers likewise see the students they serve as children in need of equipping in order to reach their fullest God-given potential. You wear your shoes of peace into the school each day looking to help children learn well. Sometimes that means taking time to understand that a child can't learn because they don't have food in their stomach, or they are worried about violence at home or bullies at school. They don't have peace and you can try to bring some into their lives. Maybe a child is so bright she needs extra resources which you try to find for her. By teaching with the whole child in mind, their overall well-being, you're being a peacemaker in the school. Not restricting students because of their differences or even annoyances, but lovingly working to bring out the best in the kids so they can be their best in a world that often discriminates for all sorts of reasons.

Perhaps I should have brought some sports shoes or hockey skates here too to remind us that in our sports as well we exemplify Christ. We show his peace in us. We talk about him and his peace in us when given the opportunity. We model peace when we have conflicts within the team or against the opponents. We respond with love and gentleness even when we are mistreated. For isn't that how Jesus responded in the face of so much injustice and suffering that he endured? I know it's not always easy but keep it in mind and remember the peace of Christ that gives you a firm footing in this world. Ask him for strength to be a peacemaker on the court or ice or anywhere you play and compete.

I brought a set of boots for our new babies. As the newest members of the church, we need to start them off right! 😊 They have lots to learn and we need to pray that they will long to wear boots of peace as they grow older. Christ has given us peace with God and equips us to be peacemakers in this world. So let's aim to model this for our children and one another.

As parents, you might be wearing your "slippers of peace" around the kids. Try to take advantage of every opportunity in your daily lives to remind your

children of Christ's peace. Talk to them about how God has shown his love to you, to them and to the world. Let them know how Jesus accepts us regardless of our sin, reconciles us to God which gives us eternal peace. Model for them and give them opportunities to be peacemakers. Help them learn the joy of peacemaking when they have differences with siblings and friends. Take them to places where they'll meet various different kinds of people. People of other ethnicities, other social groups and let them learn that all people have needs that Christ alone can meet and perhaps needs that we can help meet in Jesus' name as peacemakers. But also help them see the things we can undoubtedly learn from others.

Since we all belong to this church—or some other one, I hope—let's remember to wear our boots of peace to church too. Let these little ones learn from us. We need to ensure that we don't discriminate in any way. All people are worthy of love and equally in need of the loving salvation of Jesus Christ our Lord. He suffered and died and rose again to make us one and to help us show his love to and share his peace with others.

Anyone who walks in these doors or comes into our lives needs to be viewed as worthy of Christ's love and redemption and therefore of our love and peacemaking. Nationality, colour, gender, ability, bank account, job or hobbies are not discriminating factors. We love and serve all in the name and power of Jesus who gives us peace with God and breaks down walls of hostility among us, just as he did between Jews and Gentiles of old.

It's hard to be self-critical and to be open to where we might think we're better than someone else or how we look down on someone else. But if we truly want to learn, we must look at how Jesus reached out to all kinds of people: Jews, Gentiles, men, women, children, Samaritans, tax collectors, fishermen, adulterers, widows, healthy, sick, rich, poor. All kinds of people were welcomed to put on the boots of peace. He died for all kinds of people to enjoy the life of peace with God, reconciled to God.

Jesus modeled the peacemaking we should be striving to do. We should be looking to love and serve people who are marginalized, tearing down walls rather than building them up or hiding behind them. We should use our boots to kick down walls in defence of the vulnerable, helping our deacons, supporting Mosaic Centre, giving to World Renew today and ensuring that anyone is welcome and enfolded into the life of the church, the family of God where Jesus is our Saviour and Lord.

It should be our goal to hear people say of us—because of Jesus the words of Isaiah 52:7, which Paul also quoted:

Isa 52:7 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

May our feet be beautiful because we wear the boots of peace, we proclaim peace and we live peace so that others can see that our God reigns.

Come and pick up your boots now. Come! Slip them on. Take them with you to your workplace, to your day-to-day life. Your feet are made beautiful in Christ. Let his peace in you go out with you to the world. Let us live a life of peace in all we do.

And you can bet your boots that Jesus will be with you.