

“The Soul in Everyday Stuff: Shoes”  
Ephesians 6:10-17

As we focus today on shoes, the painting “*A Pair of Shoes*” by Vincent Van Gogh comes to mind. Take a moment to look at the painting and see what feelings it evokes in you.

Art historians believe that Van Gogh (1853–1890) came across a pair of worn-out shoes in a Paris flea market and took them back to his studio. When they did not fit him, he used them as a prop for painting. Those shoes tell a story of labor, of miles walked, and of the wear and tear of a human life.



Shoes are deeply symbolic of the journey of life. They are essential for our ability to move. Think of a time when you had to walk for a long distance and your shoes were uncomfortable. Wearing the right shoes makes all the difference for the task at hand. If you are going for a hike, you want different footwear than if you are walking across ice or standing on a polished floor.

Today, we consider a powerful image of shoes from the letter to the Ephesians: **The shoes that help us proclaim the gospel of peace.**

**The Roman Caligae: Standing Firm**

In Ephesians 6:10-17, Paul describes the "Armor of God." We must remember that Ephesus was a society saturated with symbols of imperial power.

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power; <sup>11</sup> put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, <sup>12</sup> for

our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup>Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on the evil day and, having prevailed against everything, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup>Stand, therefore, and belt your waist with truth and put on the breastplate of righteousness <sup>15</sup>and lace up your sandals in preparation for the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

The Roman soldier's shoes, known as *caligae*, were not mere sandals.



They had thick soles studded with iron nails or spikes, providing a firm grip even on slippery, blood-stained, or uneven terrain. In battle, these shoes ensured soldiers could hold their ground and not be pushed back: <https://youtu.be/rf2s6z4gm0w>.

Paul's comparison of "peace" to these rugged war-boots is intentional and subversive. Peace, like the Roman soldier's footwear, enables believers to **stand firm**. When the world around us says that might makes right, or that wealth and appearances are the only things that matter, the shoes of peace remind us of a deeper truth: our union with God and others is the actual key to our flourishing.

It is powerful to realize how the author of Ephesians took the violent imagery of the Roman Empire and "redeemed" it with faith-filled values: **Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and liberation.**

How might the power of Christ subvert the oppressive forces in our world today? By cultivating an attitude of peace. Instead of focusing on power, control, and ego, we are invited to walk the path of "letting go"—the path of humility and service. Consider where your own "shoes" are like the Roman soldier's—armored and spiked, ready to go to battle to defend your ego—and where they are humble, willing to walk the way of love.

To help us experience this true power of humility, look at the Byzantine mosaic from Venice's Basilica di San Marco, which depicts Christ washing the feet of the disciples. In this image, the order of the world is turned upside down.



In the mosaic, we see the disciples gathered around a sturdy table. Peter is closest to Jesus, one foot already in the basin. Notice the repetition of forms—the table legs, the halos, the heads—all communicating a Divine Order. This visual pattern tells us that Christ's command to wash feet is not a "one-time" event; it is the **pattern** for how we are to live.

Look closely at Christ's hands. One hand is extended in the gesture of a teacher, offering an exhortation. The other hand is wrapped in a towel, physically tending to Peter's foot. These two hands work together to show us that the Gospel is communicated through **both word and deed**. The basin itself is bejeweled, resembling a baptismal font. This reminds us that every person "born of the water" is called to be a person who is ready to bend down. To follow Christ is to be willing to take off the "war boots" of the world and kneel in the dust to serve a brother or sister.

As we conclude, look once more at Van Gogh's worn-out shoes and the mosaic of the washing of the feet.

The Christian life is not a static standing-still; it is a journey. But what kind of shoes are we wearing for that journey? Are we wearing the spikes of defensiveness and the armor of the ego? Or have we put on the "readiness" of the gospel of Peace?

The "Soul in Everyday Stuff" reminds us that even our shoes are a theological statement. Every step we take is either a step toward self-preservation or a step toward the "order" of the Kingdom - the order of service.

This week, as you put on your shoes in the morning, let this act be a prayer. May your feet be fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of Peace. May you have the strength to stand firm against the "cosmic powers of darkness" not with violence, but with the quiet, unshakable power of a love that is willing to wash the feet of the world.

**Amen.**