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How many of you have ever asked the question: Do these shoes look good with these clothes? I imagine most of us may have wondered about that at some point, and although many of us guys may not pay as much attention to shoes, I know some women who will pay much closer attention to what's on our feet. For example, had I worn these shoes (old tennis shoes), you might wonder why I was wearing an old beat up pair of tennis shoes. Maybe planning to work in the yard this afternoon. What might you think about me wearing these shoes today? (sandals) Maybe that I was going to the Indiana Dunes after church? How about these shoes (Staci's pair)? You might wonder how I got them on my feet and if my toes are hurting.

Archeological evidence suggests that footwear was invented about 40,000 years ago using soft wrap-around leather—similar to moccasins or sandals. A few thousand years later common folks wore black leather heels, while the aristocrats wore shoes crafted from wood. Fabric shoes became the popular style in the 1700s, but it wasn't until the 1800s that men's and women's shoes began to

differ in appearance, with the men's heel becoming the standard one inch tall. Finally in 1850 the right and left shoes were invented, for before then all shoes were formed straight and fit on either foot.<sup>1</sup>

When the writer of the letter to the Ephesians wrote to churches about putting on shoes, he was imagining a very different shoe from what we wear today. The writer described not only shoes, but an entire wardrobe using the common imagery of Roman military apparel: from the helmet of salvation on the top of his head to the shoes on his feet, complete with a shield of faith, breastplate of righteousness, and belt of truth. Have you ever tried to shop for a breastplate? I've checked the local Walmart and JCPenny without any success, but to be honest, I'm not sure why I would want to buy one anyway. I understand that a breastplate protects my vital organs in battle, such as my heart and lungs, but how many times do we have someone try to attack us?

At this point many of you might be thinking, *Pastor, the writer wasn't speaking about a literal*

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*breastplate, but was using the imagery symbolically.*

The writer to the Ephesians assumed there would be a cosmic battle, with forces of evil fighting the forces of good, and he warned Christians to be prepared to fight by wearing what he called the armor of God, and mimicked the Roman soldier's apparel in describing the Christian's protection.

There are some today who continue to view the world in this manner, seeing cosmic evil forces working in the world. You've probably seen movies or read books about what the end of the world might be like when evil forces collide with the world.

On the one hand, I can understand why many view the world as a place filled with evil, for the media often reminds us of bombings, shootings, and one disaster after another. The world can be a scary place, and sometimes we long for an explanation of why these bad things happen. Some find comfort in the idea that cosmic battles are going on, with the result that we humans face the shrapnel of their encounters. With this view of the

world, it would make sense to want to wear some type of spiritual armor.

On the other hand, many find this view of cosmic powers battling each other troubling in today's understanding of how the world works. Yes, things go wrong, people harm one another, and disasters happen; but many see these events as natural consequences of how the world operates and how people treat one another, not as evil forces battling one another. The forces of greed, the lust for power, and the desire for control often lead some people to cause harm to others, but we might view this as part of our human nature rather than cosmic forces.

Instead of focusing on the battle apparel described in this letter to the Ephesians, the writer suggested we wear a belt of truth to bind us to God's vision for the world. And did you notice the footwear? The writer suggested we should wear a special kind of shoe, for we should wear "Whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace." In the midst of the imagery of shields and helmets and armor, the writer encourages us to

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wear shoes to proclaim the *good news* of peace:  
Gospel Shoes.

The word *gospel* in Ephesians comes from the Greek word *euangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον) meaning “good news,” from which we get the word evangelism, but most of us are a bit squeamish about this word.

We have images in our minds of people making random calls at strangers’ houses, such as two church Elders

Arnold and Lee who were going door-to-door inviting people to church. When they knocked on the door of a woman who was not happy to see them, she told them in no uncertain terms that she did not want to hear their message and slammed the door in their faces.

To her surprise, however, the door did not close and in fact bounced back open. This time she really put her back into it and slammed the door again with the same result.

Convinced that one of these rude young church Elders was sticking his foot in the door, she reared back to give it a slam that would teach them a lesson, when Arnold said,

“Ma’am, before you do that again you need to move your cat.”<sup>2</sup>

This notion of door-to-door evangelism sounds less like telling the good news about what God is doing in the world and more like a sales campaign, to which many might suggest is not the best method, which is something Disciples pastor Martha Grace Reese discovered. She and I attended seminary together, and now she is the director of *Unbinding the Gospel*, a project on evangelism in mainline denominations. She wrote in the introduction to one of her reports,

Evangelism books presume everyone wants to do evangelism, so they tell you how to do it. Six years of national, Lilly Endowment-funded research in nine denominations have demonstrated conclusively that most people would rather get a root canal than think about evangelism. You can tell people to ‘go be missional’ until the cows come home. They just won’t do it until they want to.

Reese explains, “If we answer the ‘WHY share my faith?’ question, we’ll start wanting to know ‘HOW

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can God use me to help people move into faith?’ Our churches can’t share their faith until they’re loving, relational communities where people (1) pray and (2) talk comfortably with each other about their own faith experiences. Once our churches make this shift, we’ll want to know HOW to share our faith.”<sup>3</sup>

I suggest that telling others good news is not so hard. Just imagine waking up every morning and putting on Gospel Shoes—shoes that remind you to take awesome news with you wherever you go.

Who has ever stood in a line waiting? Wearing Gospel Shoes might remind you while waiting in a long line at the checkout counter to smile and say thank you to the sales clerk who someone just complained to about the slow line.

Or maybe your Gospel Shoes remind you to stop by the hospital to visit someone who is ill or to visit a homebound member who needs to hear a word of comfort.

Maybe your Gospel Shoes take you to visit a recent immigrant in our country who is struggling to make sense of this culture that seems so strange to her and who fears she will be sent back home to a war-torn country.

Your Gospel Shoes might help bring peace by listening to two people having an argument and helping them to hear each other’s side of the story.

Maybe the Gospel Shoes take you to someone who wonders why you come here to this church every Sunday and you begin to tell your story of your faith journey and what God has done in your life.

And just maybe, your Gospel Shoes will take you to someone who needs a place to belong, a place like this congregation who wraps people in compassion and embodies the love of God.

Put on your Gospel Shoes this week, for they really do go with everything you wear.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://all-that-is-interesting.com/fascinating-history-footwear>

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Hodgin, *1002 Humorous Illustrations*, #39 (adapted).

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in *Homiletics*, June 5, 2011