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Ephesians 6:10-20
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In a previous time,

- the prevailing wisdom said that a picture was worth 1000 words.
 - My guess is in today's world,
 - a picture is worth more like a million words. - -
- Perhaps more than ever before,
 - we live in a culture of images - -
 - where people are
 - quick to post a picture to Facebook or Instagram -
 - describing their mood or their day -
 - where folks are eager to watch a Youtube video -
 - to learn a new skill
 - where memes are driving stock prices
 - up and down.
- In 2019, there were already approximately 200 billion photos on Facebook -
 - and that's pre-pandemic,
 - add in Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and other image focused sites-
 - and the number of photos and videos -
 - produced, preserved and viewed
 - in the course of daily life -

- is almost beyond comprehension.
- The technology that exists today,
 - obviously makes this focus on images
 - far easier to embrace than ever before, - -
 - but if you think about it,
 - the focus on images is actually not new -
 - from the very beginnings of organized human life
 - individuals have attempted to convert ideas
 - into images -
 - to share their thoughts with others -
 - through pictures. -
 - From early sketches scrawled on cave walls,
 - to the great painting across cultures,
 - to books and poems which attempt to paint pictures with words, -
- Images -
 - have always been
 - and continue to be
 - a vital tool in effective communication. -
- So instead of simply telling the Ephesians -
 - that it was important for them to have a strong connection to God,
 - so they would be able to deal with the effects of evil in their lives,
 - the letter to the Ephesians -

- turns to an image
 - that would have been understood by nearly everyone in that time, -
 - an image of armor and conflict. - -
- The letter
 - invites the hearer to see evil,
 - not as some intellectual concept,
 - but rather as a foe, - -
 - as an attacking enemy,
 - to be repelled -
 - and then invites the community to visualize -
 - the ways in which God -
 - equips each of God's people
 - to stand strong against this attacking enemy of evil
 - that seeks to pull us away from God.
- This battle, -
 - the letter says, -
 - is not against enemies of flesh and blood. -
 - This isn't a call to fight another child of God
 - to engage in worldly conquest or domination, - -
 - This is a way to help us see that God equips us
 - with the gifts we need -
 - to help us push back against the evil

- that is a part of our world. -
- God equips us with
 - the Belt of Truth,
 - the Breastplate of Righteousness,
 - with Shoes to proclaim Peace,
 - with the Shield of Faith,
 - with the Helmet of Salvation,
 - with the Sword of the Spirit,
- and with the power of prayer -
- so that we might be able to stand firm,
- when we are faced with -
- the spiritual forces of evil. (Eph 6:12)

For the people of the first century world,

- I imagine these images evoked clear, powerful pictures in their minds. -
- After all chances are -
- they may have experienced what it meant -
- to repel an attacking foe
- may have worn armor or seen someone in armor,
- might have carried a sword,
- or at least knew someone close to them
- that had -
- These images were not something from a museum, video game or movie, -

- this was everyday life, -
 - you wore a belt cinched around your waist,
 - to hold your garment together
 - to give you a place to hang important items - -
 - so seeing God's truth as a belt would make perfect sense -
 - for like a belt,
 - God's truth surrounds you -
 - helps you to hold together
 - your understanding of the world -
 - and provides a place
 - upon which to hang
 - your beliefs.
 - You wore a breastplate -
 - to protect your heart,
 - to protect your core from attack and harm. -
 - Wearing your righteousness -
 - having a strong connection to God -
 - and history of following God's path -
 - helps keeps us out of trouble and -
 - protects our heart from going astray.
 - You put on shoes to protect your feet -
 - to make it easier to travel out into the world,

- to work, to gather food, to care for others -
- as followers of Jesus -
- we are called to go out and share the story of God's love
- called to proclaim the peace
- that comes from following Jesus
- so putting on shoes -
- would make that journey easier. - -
- You carry a shield to deflect blows
- and to protect you from harmful objects coming your way -
- so having faith can help protect you -
- from temptations and hurtful ideas -
- that come in your direction. -
- You wear a helmet to surround your head with protection -
- to preserve your life from blows -
- that otherwise might prove fatal, -
- Well - - the gift of salvation surrounds our soul -
- with the promise that
- not even death can defeat God -
- thus preserving your life forever. - -
- And you carry a sword to defend yourself, protect yourself
- and project power, -
- carrying the sword of the Spirit,

- the Word of God, -
- helps to guide you through difficult times,
- supports you in moments of trial-
- and helps you to share God's story -
- with the world. -
- The full armor of God may not be made of metal, leather and wood,
- may not be something that you can purchase in a store,
- but the letter to the Ephesians -
- wants us to picture the ways that God equips us -
- so that when we face evil in our lives, -
- we know with all certainty that aren't facing it alone. - -
- This image, it seems to me,
- is meant to help us to know that
- God has given us -
- the tools we need -
- to equip us -
- to stand firm
- against whatever evil we may face -
- And I know that -
- connecting the love of God and images armor -
- doesn't paint a helpful picture for some people of the way in which -
- God equips us to stand firm against evil.

- To be sure, armor shows up in places of conflict,
- in moments of oppression,
- in service of empire,
- in places of death and loss,
- But for me what is important in this letter is not the armor,
- but the invitation to picture how God is and can be present in your life,
- to equip us to stand firm against evil. -
- So if you are a painter,
- you might think of the canvas of faith,
- the paint brush of righteousness,
- the paint of the spirit,
- the model of truth -
- and you might see evil
- as a lack of creativity.
- If you are a builder,
- you might think of the blueprints of truth,
- the safety helmet of salvation,
- the hammer of the Spirit,
- the work boots to share peace,
- and picture evil as
- delays and bad weather.
- If you are an football player,

- you might think of the game plan of truth,
- the shoulder pads of righteousness,
- the cleats to share peace,
- the helmet of salvation - -
- and evil as the opposing team.
- We live in a visual time. -
- We communicate using images,
- so I think the invitation for you and for me -
- is to select one of the nearly endless number of images from our daily life
- and allow that image to help us visualized
- God standing with us
- and equipping us to stand firm against evil,
- And with the help of that image, then,
- to claim the resources
- of truth, righteousness, peace,
- faith, salvation, the Spirit and prayer -
- that God provides each of us -
- for our life of faith.
- For while there is no doubt that evil is a very real part of the world,
- the Good News we are reminded of today,
- is that not only is God's power ultimately stronger than any evil -
- but God,

- through Jesus,
- through the Spirit,
- through Scripture and prayer -
- has shared that God's power with us -
- so that we might successfully stand firm against the forces of evil
- and remain strong amidst the struggles
- and problems of life.