

## **On Holy Ground**

Exodus 3:1-6

Luke 15: 11-24

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Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

### *Exodus 3:1-6*

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

### *Luke 15: 11-24*

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.'" So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'"

So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

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There is a children's hymn chorus that some of you may remember from Sunday School:

*Do you know, Oh Christian, you're a sermon in shoes?*

*Do you know, Oh Christian, you're a sermon in shoes?*

*Jesus calls upon you, to spread the gospel news,*

*So walk it, and talk it, a sermon in shoes.*

*Live it, and give it, a sermon in shoes.*

*Teach it, and preach it, a sermon in shoes.*

*Know it, and show it, a sermon shoes.*

These lyrics by Ruth Harms Calkins are a reminder that wherever a Christian walks, we are expected to share the Gospel news to others. Whether it is by words, actions, or attitudes, a Christian is always a sermon in shoes. It goes along with something that the 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelist Dwight L. Moody said, “The preaching that this world needs most is the sermons in shoes that are walking with Jesus Christ.”

Just as much as people need to hear the gospel and have it explained, they also need to see it lived out in genuine ways. Words are of course important and essential, yet without authentic actions and attitudes our words fall as only lip service, as a nice idea but not a lived reality. Ultimately our walk is much larger, more meaningful, more sincere, more profound, more impactful, than our talk.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, and to us, with encouragement to put on the whole armor of God, to stand firm, and to put on our feet whatever will make us ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. The shoes on our feet as we walk in faith, as we walk this Lenten journey with Jesus to Jerusalem, to Golgotha, are a symbol of our covenant made in our baptismal promises and their renewal, to be Christ’s disciples, to walk in the ways of our Savior, to resist oppression and evil, to show love and justice and to witness to the work and the word of Jesus Christ as we are best able.

Yet there are certainly, naturally, times when we wander away from our covenant, from our baptismal promises, and walk our own path. We stop standing firm and wearing the whole armor of God until like the prodigal child we recognize that we are in need as we have squandered the gifts and grace of God. When we lose our way walking in faith we are walking with the prodigal son. We wander off for what seems to be greener pastures until we find ourselves in a famine starving for the love, grace and peace of a right relationship walking with Creator, Christ and Spirit. We return to God unsure of how we will be received, if we will be punished or welcomed, yet what we receive is the extravagant and compassionate welcome home as the prodigal son once received from his father. We too are robed in forgiveness, grace and love. Like the ring upon the son’s finger, our identity and our belonging are restored. And upon our feet sandals are placed so that we can again walk with God with a renewed sense of purpose.

In Jesus’ parable, the younger son had culturally wished his father dead so that he could have his inheritance when he wanted it. He received it and set out on his own—his own lifestyle, his own community, his own way of living on his own terms, until all that he had was gone, squandered and wasted. In the midst of a famine—for the community that struggled to find enough food to eat—and his personal financial famine—the younger son hired himself out as a servant to one of the citizens of his new country. One of the first things that happened to him as a servant was that his sandals were taken from him. This sign of comfort was taken from hired servants as it made it much harder for them to run away. Out into the fields he went, a young Jewish man, wandering in the dust and filth and tending to the pigs who were much better fed than he could possibly be. He had wanted his own life and had been so eager for it that he had abandoned his family, his religion, his cultural traditions and ethics, and now lived in the depths of a physical, emotional and spiritual famine.

In time Jesus said, ‘he came to himself,’ realizing who he really was, who he loved, and where he was truly home. Hoping against hope that he would be received as a hired hand among family and community, which would mean a much better life than he ever would have alone tending to the pigs, he traveled barefoot and hungry to his home country. Before he could even begin all the words and tears of apologies that burned within him his father in overwhelming love had placed a robe, ring and sandals upon him. The sandals were a loving welcome to this

restoration and reconciliation of a new beginning, to the healing of their relationship, to a renewed purpose and meaning for his life. The sandals were even more than a comfort and a luxury as the son was now content to stay and no more run away.

The prodigal son's sermon in his new shoes is that we are always loved and welcomed back by God, that we are restored and loved with unmerited grace.

Just as there is a time to put on shoes, there is a time to remove them. Moses living in hiding and worked as a shepherd for his father-in-law, is not-yet the Moses who led God's people from captivity to the promised land. In the midst of an ordinary day God called him from the life he knew and to one he could have never imagined as God spoke to him from a bush that was burning, flaming, yet not damaged or consumed by fire as he heard God's call that he was to become Moses-the-leader-and-the-lawgiver. For the first time in human history, God gives a name, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," and the instruction, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." In reverent obedience, humbleness and awe, Moses took off what was dirty, took off what symbolized what was earthly and profane to offer respect and submission.

The sermon Moses preached without shoes is that we too are to recognize the holy when we experience it, and that we respond in awe with obedience and humbleness.

Do you know, Oh Christian, you're a sermon in shoes? Jesus calls upon you to spread the gospel news, to walk it, and talk it, to live it, and give it, to teach it, and preach it, to know it, and show it, your sermon in shoes. Amen.