2/27-28/21 Lent in Plain Sight: Shoes Rev. Amy Haines

Mk 6:6b-13 NIV Lent Series

What types of shoes do you have – in your closet, on your floor, in your garage, even on your feet this day? Do you have tennis shoes and slippers? Do you have any dress shoes or sandals?

Do you have any work boots or snow boots or hiking boots? Do you have your favorite shoes you wear everyday? And special shoes stored for special days?

Most of us own many different types of shoes for many different reasons. And most of us will think about what we wear when, and purchase specific shoes for specific reasons. We would be crazy to wear flip flops in the snow and snow boots in the sand. High heels aren’t practical for nurses in a hospital and slippers are frowned upon anyplace outside of home.

Today, as we continue in this season of Lent, we continue to look at ordinary items and what they can remind us about God and our journey with Jesus.

We began the season of Lent reflecting on dust and masks as signs of our mortality, as well as the bread and cup of God’s grace. Last week we reflected on oil to remind us that we are anointed for our faith journeys, and we need to be ready to follow Jesus now as well as ready to meet Jesus at the end of our journeys.

Today, we continue this journey of Lent reflecting on our shoes.

As Ephesians 6:15 reminds us,

“As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel [of peace].”

Today, our shoes remind us to ready for mission. God’s mission. And what is our mission? It is to live and share and proclaim the ways of God in this world.

In our Scripture today from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is continuing to share his message of God’s kingdom ways from village to village, in home and synagogue and along the street and seashore. He then expands his ministry by sending out the disciples 2x2 into even more villages in the Galilee region of Judea. They are sent to follow in the footsteps of John the Baptist, calling for repentance, as well as teaching about a new way to live, by God’s kingdom ways in the here and now. The disciples are also given authority over unclean spirits.

To truly understand the impact of their mission, we need to back up six verses to the beginning of chapter 6. Even though Jesus’ ministry has begun to spread throughout the Galilee, when Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth, he was rejected there.

His hometown crowd struggled to see him as anyone different than Mary’s son, the boy who was expected to be a carpenter, following in the footsteps of Joseph, yet who aspired to be more. They knew his siblings. They knew his stories of childhood. They could not deny that he had a firm grasp on God’s Word, and was a quick learner. But how dare he try to teach them?

Who gave him such authority? They could not get past his past to see his present, and thus, rejected Jesus.

I can understand a bit of the struggle of the synagogue at Nazareth. There are those at my home church of First Middletown who still struggle to see Edna’s daughter as a nearby preacher. They remember me running around church, singing in the choir and playing handbells and active in youth group. There are those who are still amazed in the way God called me.

Have you ever known someone who did such a 180 in attitude and lifestyle that you still struggle to accept the person they have become, not holding them to living like the person they used to be? Especially if the past included rebellion or addiction, at times it is hard not to be skeptical of their present, allowing for transformation.

Sadly, those in Nazareth rejected Jesus so soundly they would not listen to him and he could do no miracles there. As verse 6a reminds us in the Common English Bible: “He was appalled by their unbelief.”

If you and I were to face such rejection and dismissal and skepticism, would we try and find a corner to lick our wounds, would we second guess ourselves, or would we be like Jesus, appalled but undeterred?

Jesus didn’t allow Nazareth’s rejection to slow him down for long. His feet continued to carry him from village to village. Then Jesus expanded his ministry, by sending forth his disciples 2x2 into even more villages around him.

The disciples’ sandals were going to get a workout! Remember, there were no cars and few donkeys. People traveled from town to town by walking, and resting, and walking some more.

Jesus was very specific when sending out his disciples on what they would take and not take; what they would do and not do. They would take a staff and wear sandals. They would not take bread or money or wear two tunics. They would stay in one place if they were welcomed, sharing Jesus’ call to repentance, casting out demons and anointing the sick with oil. If they were not welcome, they would leave shaking the dust off their feet, taking nothing of that place with them.

Have you ever packed that light for any trip?

The first time Nathan went camping with the Boy Scouts, I confess that I helped him pack—and half of what we packed he never wore or never needed. I like the motto “Be Prepared” but there is also a way to be overprepared.

I was shocked when he was preparing for his first full week at boy scout camp and the advice was to send only his uniform shirt and 2-3 other shirts with him—for 7 days! Now, many years and campouts later, I have realized that half the clothes sent with boys will come home unworn. They are encouraged to change their socks and underwear daily, but I’m no longer surprised if they show up for worship straight from a campout in the clothes they slept in the night before!

I’ve also never been on a mission trip that packed that light. Every mission trip I’ve ever been involved in had a list of what to bring and what not to bring. Bring work clothes and casual clothes. Don’t bring a lot of money or electronics. Bring towels and tools, bedding and garbage bags.

We overpack. That is what we do.

So why did Jesus tell his disciples to take so little? They didn’t really have much to begin with, so why take even less?

I believe Jesus wanted them unencumbered for the journey. The less they took, the less they had to worry about. The less they took, the more they had to rely on the hospitality of strangers. And when they relied on the hospitality of strangers, those moments became possibilities for mission and ministry.

Jesus also began to teach them how to deal with rejection. They saw him rejected in Nazareth, yet he kept going. He told them if they were rejected, to literally shake the dust off their feet and keep walking.

How much faith does that take, to trust and keep going?

To not give up when we fail, but try something new?

When the disciples stepped out in faith, they had to trust the One who sent them. These are the same disciples who argued over seats of honor in Jesus’ kingdom. The same disciples who didn’t always understand Jesus’ teachings. The same disciples who questioned Jesus. And they were being sent forth in his name, to continue his mission!

If Jesus sent them, he also sends us.

We will never ever be fully ready to follow God’s call.

Have you ever been reluctant to go where God leads, hesitant to do what God calls, even averse to serve where God sends?

How often do we drag our feet? How often do we put on the wrong shoes to intentionally slow ourselves down? How often do we step forward, but very, very slowly? How often do we act like Jonah and run in the other direction?

God says invite your neighbor, and we argue we haven’t even walked next door to learn our neighbors’ name. God says sign up for a specific ministry and we give every excuse why we are not good for that ministry. God says step out of your comfort zone, and we take a step backward, moving more inside ourselves. God says be in ministry here, and we try to do ministry there instead.

Can you imagine all of the excuses God has heard from God’s people as to why we don’t want to step forward in mission, as to why we can’t or shouldn’t or don’t want to go where God sends us?

We’re too busy. We don’t have the money. We’re not trained.

It’s bad timing. It’s too risky. It’s not my thing.

They’re not like us. We’re not like them.

We’re too old. We’re too young.

Sometimes we even deny that we ever hear a call from God.

We will never ever be fully ready to follow God’s call. Yet God calls us anyway.

So the next time you look at your feet, and more specifically, the shoes on your feet, know that God calls you to go—to go and live and serve in Jesus’ name.

And as we go, remember: those whom God calls, God equips. God will give us the right shoes, so to speak, to go out and live into his mission.

Not every mission will need hiking boots or tennis shoes. We are called to serve in many different ways, in many different fields, through our workplaces and our homes, our neighborhoods and our church, the places we work out and the places we hang out.

And as we go, may our shoes remind us also to trust.

As we trust the One who sends us, we also trust that God is with us. We are not alone!

We do not take one step forward in faith alone!

In John 14, Jesus’ final words to his disciples, he promised them, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth.” (John 14:16 NIV)

God is with us, through the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, our Counselor and Companion! The Holy Spirit is God working in and through and among us in this world. The Holy Spirit will encourage us and empower us, challenge us and nurture us.

We may think we can do ministry on our own power, but we cannot. We must step forward in faith trusting in God’s power to lead and guide us. God has held us together for the past year.

God will bring us through whatever this next year brings, if we trust him.

As we trust that God is with us, we also have to trust the message entrusted to us, to live and share in word and action.

We have to trust God’s message is a message of love and grace, a message of salvation and new life, a message of hope and meaning. We are all God’s beloved children. Jesus has come to save us all. Not some, not a few, but all who will confess and believe.

If we do not believe this message we are called to proclaim, we cannot then share it authentically with others. The world around us yearns to see us live what we believe, to be authentic witnesses in word and action, in call and care.

When we trust the message, we then have to trust the direction God sends us, the movement of our feet, so to speak, especially when God sends us down new paths for new ministries with new people.

The phrases “We’ve always done it that way” and “we’ve never done that before” ought to be stricken from our vocabulary, for they are like road blocks to God’s vision and direction.

This does not mean we throw out everything old to make way for the new. What this means is we are prayerfully open to whatever direction God may take us, revamping what works to make it stronger and trying new ways of ministry to reach out with God’s message and grace.

Finally, as we trust God’s direction, we trust God’s call in each and every one of us. None of us are perfect. Neither were the first disciples. We will all make mistakes, but we are still called to step forward in faith.

I have found, over my journey of faith, God really does not send us out in random ways to random places to live for God in this world. Rather, I believe we are sent out in specific ways by God, to the people, the contexts and the struggles that use our passions, our skills, and our experiences, even those skills we did not realize we had or those experiences we dismissed.

I’ve shared before, but will share again, a banner I saw hanging in a church in Evanston, Illinois during seminary. The banner declared: “The sign of God is that you will be led where you did not plan to go.”

That was true for the disciples long ago, and that is true for us today.

When the disciples got out of their own way, and trusted that God was with them and guiding them, and they followed Jesus’ instruction, verses 12-13 proclaim: (CEB edited)

“So they went out and proclaimed that people should [repent, that they] change their hearts and lives. They cast out many demons, and they anointed many sick people with olive oil and healed them.”

They followed in the faith of Jesus! They did might works like he did! They shared the power of God through their words and actions!

What is God calling us to do, as the people of God in this world, as a community of faith in Springboro? How is God calling us to build robust multi-generational relationships that show and share God’s love and grace with all ages? How is God calling us to reach out to the least of these who live around us? How is God calling us to renewed study as we plan for a re-opening of Sunday School this spring? How is God calling us to step forward in faith and run the race that is set before us?

In closing, consider these words by Jill Duffield:

..Shoes for mission must be sturdy, comfortable, and appropriate for all terrain. Sandals in Jesus’ day and climate would have fit that bill. Sandals were easily removed. Dust shaken off. Feet readily washed. Repeat as necessary. Therefore, the wearer could enter and leave a town, a neighborhood, a home without delay, assistance, or fanfare. If we too seek to serve, our shoes should reflect our willingness to go wherever Jesus sends us, to whoever welcomes our word and work. Shoes for mission signal—to the wearer and the ones to whom that wearer is sent—willing participation in the life and work of the place their feet take them. Shoes for mission allow for jumping into a community with both feet.

--Jill Duffield *Lent in Plain Sight* p.94-96

As we continue on this journey of Lent, may our shoes remind us of our mission, and call us to take the next step forward in faith and faithfulness and mission and ministry.

May God guide us, this day and always. Let us pray.