

Exodus 3:1-6

Lent 4

Scripture Exodus 3:1-6

Moses at the Burning Bush

3 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 Mount Horeb,^[a] the mountain of God. ² 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. ³ Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴ 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." ⁵ Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ 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.

Sermon: Lent in Plain Sight: Shoes

In today's text we hear God speaking to Moses, "Remove your sandals," But on Ash Wednesday Kelley reminded us of Jesus's words to the disciples - "Wear your sandals." It reminds me of mornings with sweet Collins. Our 1.5 year old has an affinity for shoes. All the shoes. My shoes, her dad's shoes, her sisters, shoes. Shoes lying around at homes of friends we happen to be visiting. When you ask her if she wants to go somewhere the first thing she will go and do is get some shoes, whether they match or not does not seem to matter to her. Really, whether they are hers or not isn't of large importance either, but she knows that to "go" means she will need shoes.

At the same time, when we come home I like to take my shoes off. Not this child. You can ask and ask and ask and each time you will get “Uh-uh”. I eventually have to pry them off of her as she tries to crawl across our oatmeal-colored couch in her dirty shoes. And even then she spends no less than the next five minutes pissed that you took her shoes off of her. I’m not sure how she became so finicky about shoes, but this on and off business surely reminds me of the duality presented by the texts we have heard during this series about wearing or not wearing our shoes.

Like Ecclesiastes reminding us that there is a time to plant and a time to reap, a time to mourn and a time to dance (Eccl. 3:1-8), these texts from Exodus and Mark demonstrate that there is a time to stop and a time to go. God tells Moses to take off his sandals before the burning bush, to feel the earth beneath his feet and be grounded in that holy moment. By contrast, shoes are just about the only thing Jesus wants his disciples to have for their journey. No money, no bag, no extra clothes—just sandals and a staff. He wants them to move, to walk unencumbered as they proclaim the good news.

But what it leads me to believe, especially in this season of Lent is that we can’t have one without the other. We can’t go, and proclaim the good news, and lead the people, and do the work God is calling us to if we don’t first, like Moses,

take off our shoes and stand in the presence of the Holy. In this moment that we find Moses, Moses is told to remove his shoes. It's as if the request is this, "Draw away the covering that has protected you. Clear away the barrier between yourself and the earth so that your bare feet may touch and sink and take root in this holy ground. Let this living soil coat your skin. Dig in, feel your way, and find your balance here upon this mountain, so that its life becomes your life, its fire your fire, its sacred sand and rock the ground of your seeing, speaking, and calling."

To hear the calling, to prepare for it, Moses has to first remove all pretenses about who he thinks he is and be reminded by the Holy who created him, just who he is.

What shoes do we wear? More importantly what do our shoes represent about our life? Sometimes I wear my tennis shoes because I want to pretend that I enjoy running but I don't. In courtrooms you see lawyers with fancy shined dress shoes to remind others that they mean business. Doctors and nurses in operating rooms wear coverings over their shoes to keep the room sterile. Industrial workers wear steel toe boots so their feet are protected. The shoes we wear say something about who we are. What we do. They convey our sense of style or our need for comfort. They can say something about our financial status or our age.

Our shoes whether we want them to or not say something about who we are. Some of us have sneakers with worn soles and fraying straps that speak of humility and a long journey. For another, a platform heel adds the illusion of height and stability. Some rests within the space and protection of a wide toe box, while another lurches precariously atop stiletto heels. Shoes may be shined, tooled, stitched, or adorned to project success and authority. They may convey simplicity or beauty. They may be shoes for walking slow or running fast. They might feel comfortable or they might hurt. Whatever their meanings, uses, and effects, in this holy place God commands God's servant to take them off.

In removing his shoes, Moses releases himself from every claim so that he can accept the claim God makes upon him. He will strip away strivings for status, success, and stability. He will find his true ground and he will know where he stands. It is from that place, that he will go to fulfill the call of God on his life. It is from that place we see him live out Jesus's future words to adorn sandals and staff and get to work. But you see – he can't go from one without the other. And all of it has me wondering two things.

The first is this, when was the last time we took off our shoes, and took the time to remember who we are. When was the last time we made space to stand in the presence of the Holy and let who we are be who are. Without holding onto

all of our foibles and misgivings, without all of our achievements and accolades, but just to stand as one created by a God who loves us? When was the last time we went through our day without thinking we had something to prove? If we were to take off our shoes, don't worry I won't actually ask you to right now, but if we did, what claim would the sacred soil make upon you?³ Will you stand differently in the place where God has called you? This reading challenges us to remove our shoes and feel between our toes the clay God uses to shape the future. God invites us to stand barefoot in an attitude of wonder as we witness God's presence in the blazing fire that does not consume and be reminded of who God has claimed us to be. I hope that this lent we will find time to be reminded who we are, to stand barefoot in the grass of the dirt and connect with the divine just as we are.

The other thing this text has stirred up in me, that likely could have been another sermon, so I hope I can get some grace on that, is what does it mean if we as a community or a congregation harnessed some of this barefoot, just as we are, energy? What does it look like if as a community we stand in the soil of the Holy? You know there are a lot of people out there that want to say that the church is no longer relevant. That faith communities don't have anything to offer anymore that you can't find somewhere else. Some want to say, that the way we

have always done it is no longer speaking to people. That the way we welcome needs a new spin. That we need fancier tactics to entice young families or others seeking wholeness in their life to harken our doors. And maybe some of that has some truth in it. I definitely am the first to admit there are things that need to go and things we could be more creative about. But what I would argue is that we don't need to change the core of who we are. On our best days, when we are paying attention to the way the holy is moving in and through us, then who the church is- is who God has created us to be. Maybe we, as a community, could take a nod from today's scripture and lean into a more simplistic vulnerable barefooted space. Not with fancy light systems and drum sets. Not with catchy marketing schemes and flashy prizes. But with barefooted attentiveness to the Holy in and around us. What does it look like for the church to step into the holy soil and meet with God?

Maybe in taking off our shoes, we are able to let the silence be, the white space around the margins of our words stand, maybe we simply tell the story of God and God's love. Maybe we remind people about how God made all things and declared them good. Maybe we tell the stories of Moses and his reluctance, or Ruth and her loyalty, or even better yet, of Jesus' heart for the least of these. Maybe we decide to let ourselves go gray and invite people into the messy gray

areas of life too.

Maybe in taking off our shoes, we learn to pray with people, not in that “I’m going to fix you now” sort of way, but just to tell God that we’re grateful for that particular person — mortal, guilty, beloved just as they are. Maybe we gulp and let go of our pieties and lounge in God’s grace, which finally confesses that we live by faith and that there are some things we just don’t know. Maybe we tell the stories of the blessed, the dreamer and the drunkard, beauty and brokenness, and we sing, as if all the world needs a lullaby.

Maybe, in taking off our shoes, we let the Holy Spirit do the heavy lifting, in God’s time, not ours. Because what every generation seeks and rejects, only to reclaim it again, is wisdom. Humbled and barefooted, we listen as the melody seeks us and we realize it harmonizes with all our hopes and all our dreams just as it always has. I think there is still relevancy in all of that. There is still relevancy in walking alongside one another in community.

You see in taking off our shoes, as individuals and as a community, we remember who we are. We remember where we come from and in the moment where our toes feel the cool of the earth, we are reminded the work we are called to do. As we find our footing in the holy soil, we will know what it means to refuse complicity and work for justice. God will empower us to challenge rulers

and bring hope to the hopeless. For once we have set our feet on the Holy Ground beneath us we will know the work which is ours to do. From the holy ground we will put on our shoes and our beautiful, broken, and beloved feet will lead the way to bringing wholeness to the broken world. But for now, let's spend lent with our feet in the soil. Let's spend lent remembering we are loved deeply by a God who believes in us and needs us for the journey ahead. Amen.