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Lent 4 C – March 27, 2022

“Shoes”

Read: Ephesians 6: 10 – 20 / Memorize Ephesians 6: 14 & 15

Take a good look at your shoes. Are they comfortable? stylish? utilitarian? Do they matter to you or did you just put on whatever was available this morning? On the other hand, think about your shoes at home. How many pairs do you own? I’m limited in the shoes I can wear because of a problem with my Achilles tendon, but boots are different. I did an inventory of my boots.

I have a pair of boots for shoveling snow. They’re warm and comfy, but I hate walking in them because they’re floppy. I have a pair of boots for walking. They’re not as stable as my snow boots but I’ve broken them in really well. I have a pair of steel-toed work boots. They weigh a ton but have protected my feet in many situations. I have a pair of boots that I wear when we go to visit Chad. He’s a farmer. Those boots take me through the muck of fields. I have a dress pair of boots for the winter. Footwear can be pretty important to us.

There are lots of references in the Bible to footwear. Sometimes it’s about taking them off; at other times about putting them on. One of the more famous stories involved Moses. He was about 80 years old. He’s out taking care of his father-in-law’s sheep. He had no plan to meet God, but God had a plan to meet him.

God got his attention through a burning bush that wasn’t consumed. We hear about it in Exodus 3. God tweaked his curiosity. He wanted to know why the bush was burning, but not consumed. As he came closer, God called, “Moses, Moses!” and Moses said three words that changed his life: “Here I am.” If you don’t make yourself available, God can’t use you. When you make yourself available, God can change your life and the lives of many others.

Knowing he was available, God told him to take off his shoes. Just imagine taking your shoes off on hot, burning sand. But God had a reason for saying that. He tells Moses that this is holy ground. What Moses thought would just be a

momentary interlude, changed his life. God wanted him to stay and talk. He had a mission for him. He would call him to it; then send him off.

Have you ever been on holy ground? Do you know what it looks like? Some believe that the ground is holy because of its use. Think Church. I think it goes beyond that. When God invited Moses to take off his shoes, he was inviting him to stay awhile because He wanted Moses to listen to Him. He was going to teach him about holy ground.

God wants us to listen also, but it can't stop at that. Once we've heard Him, we need to put our sandals on and go! We want to find and make holy ground. We're seeing holy ground at 59 Buffalo Street, as we present our gift of support to Habitat this weekend. As we respond to God's plan of "Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!" we are creating holy ground wherever we go.

Whether you thought about it or not, each week, as you've responded by bringing bread, a gift for Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, you're been creating holy ground, spaces where people can find the love and care of Jesus in the midst of their needs.

Getting new shoes is no big deal to me. I don't have to wonder if I can afford them. That's not true for everyone. I invited you to bring your gently used shoes to help others and that is a blessing of holy ground. Jill makes a point about shoes and underwear in one of her devotions this week that perhaps you've not thought about. I know I hadn't.

For those who have nothing, receiving new shoes, new underwear or anything that has never been used before can have a special significance. When you get something new, even something simple like underwear and shoes, can make you feel valued. People who only have the clothes on their back or a garbage bag of their belongings, often feel undervalued. People pass by them without thinking. Those new shoes, underwear or a toothbrush can give them a sense of holy ground that God has provided for them.

Just as Moses was invited to stay, we need to spend time with God, listening to how He wants us to serve; then obey. We can't just listen. Listening leads us to action in love. How might we use the resources He has provided to create holy ground for those in need around us?

Speaking of someone who was in need, Peter had been arrested by Herod. Herod had killed James, the brother of John, and gotten quite a rise from the audience. He had Peter imprisoned for a repeat performance. To be sure that Peter would be available he charged four squadrons of soldiers, sixteen men to guard him around the clock. Peter slept between two soldiers, bound in chains, and had two soldiers at the entrance of his cell. Herod was not going to lose this catch.

Things looked pretty, pretty bleak for Peter, but the church was in prayer for him. We're told in Acts 12 that in the middle of the night an angel appeared to him and a light shone in the cell. That didn't wake him up. So the angel woke him up by poking him.

He gave Peter orders to get up, put on his clothes and sandals and follow him. Peter thought he was dreaming. It is only when he found himself out on the street and the angel disappears, that he realizes that God has made a way for him. He brings that good news to friends and then goes on his way.

What do we learn from this? God is in the business of making a way for us. Jesus made the way to free us from the bondage of sin, death and the devil. God is always making a way for us. Think back over your life when things have been difficult. Think about how God has made a way for you in difficult times. It likely was not the way you unexpected or would have done it. He makes the best way for us. We want to realize that and have our sandals on, ready to go His way.

We want to go because we are facing a battle. We don't often think about it. It is as violent and deceptive as any battle being fought now. It is being fought between good and evil. All who have faith in Jesus Christ, are on the side of good, because they are on God's side.

What do we need to do? Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm."

It would sound awful scary if not for Jesus in our lives. Notice that armor: the belt of truth buckled around our waist and the breastplate of righteousness in place. Listen carefully about our feet. They are fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

How many times do we consider that each day? I might settle down for a few moments and think about what's happening in that cosmic battle. But then my brain calls me away to the things that are on my to-do list. Yes, we pray each night for the people of the Ukraine and all who are struggling throughout the world, but I don't always envision myself enlisted in the battle, yet I am. The battle I'm in, the battle we're all in, is to bring that Gospel of peace to those who do not know it. To remind those who know it, to stand firm!

We are called to do that arduous work of reconciliation, bringing people together. I was impressed to hear about people doing just that. In those situations people find out that we really have more in common than we disagree upon. It changes the relationship when we recognize people for who they are rather than as objects of our hatred.

As we put on the armor we notice that most of the armor is meant to be defensive. We cannot force people to find peace with God or with each other. We are called to be reconcilers who risk our lives to bring people back into relationship, especially with Jesus.

Paul reminds us that God risked all in Jesus. God sent Jesus into our world while we were still sinners to redeem and reconcile us to our Father, because of His great love. We want to think clearly about that. He calls us to put ourselves under the Lordship of Jesus, submitting to His call, just as generations of people before us have done.

Through a ministry of reconciliation, generations to come will hear the voice of Jesus rather than the devil, who revels in creating conflict through distrust. We want to make sure we've got on the right shoes for the work God has for us. As we wear the Gospel of peace on our feet, we are creating holy ground, where the love of Jesus Christ changes lives for all people!

Here's your question: What will you do to bring reconciliation to those around you?