



It Would Have Been Easier if Jesus had Left His Sandals Behind

Ascension of Our Lord
16 May 2021

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Chris

Luke 24:44-53

[Jesus said to the eleven and those with them,] “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

When I come home from work, I can often tell what my family has been up to by the number of shoes that are left in our laundry room when I open the door. If I am really lucky, there will be mud, or grass, or mulch attached to someone’s shoes – to further offer explanation as to their activities. For my middle child, the smell alone of her tennis shoes on a hot day will tell me that she has been playing basketball. The oldest, who is working a part-time job in landscaping, usually leaves a trail of mulch behind these days. And the youngest – well grass, mud, chalk dust – sometimes one of tell-tale sign and sometimes all the signs will share with me the adventures of an almost 8-year-old after a full day of school and outside activities. I may roll my eyes at the continuous need for a vacuum cleaner but, truth-be-told, I like playing detective and figuring out at least a part of their daily activities without asking – though I could give up the overwhelming smell of feet in a heartbeat. I love knowing that my children were active and entertained themselves for a time outside of the time they are attached to a screen.

I sometimes think It would have been easier if Jesus would have left his sandals behind.

On this day that we celebrate the Ascension of Jesus into heaven, it would have been easier if he would have left his sandals behind. Sandals stained with water from one too many moments of meeting disciples, who were fishermen by trade, at the edge of the Sea of Galilee. Sandals dirtied with the mud from a healing of a blind man or a stray wheat kernel from a field. Sandals marked with a drop of blood from a stubbed toe or a wine stain from a supper with friends or a moment of celebration at a wedding. Sandals coated with the dust of roads travelled on the way to Bethany to raise his friend Lazarus from the dead and the road to Emmaus when Jesus opened the eyes of disciples to his resurrected presence. Sandals formed to the feet of a Savior who walked into the homes of tax collectors and ate meals with prostitutes. Sandals smelling of fish oil from the feeding of 5000. Sandals blackened when they got too close to the charcoal fire Jesus used to cook breakfast for the disciples. Sandals dried and coated with the tears of countless unnamed children of God who begged for healing – who hungered to be heard and seen – whom Jesus saw and heard and healed again and again and again. It would have been easier if Jesus had left his sandals behind.



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Just before Jesus disappeared from their sight, he left the disciples with these words: “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

After all the weeks and months and more the disciples have spent with Jesus during his public ministry prior to his resurrection, and now after 40 days with Jesus *after* the resurrection, we might think the disciples would be starting to catch on, that they would have at least a decent understanding of what Luke calls “the scriptures.” But they do not. They are still confused and mixed up and doubtful — joyful, yes, but “in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering.” (And so even here, in his very last moments with them before his ascension, Jesus is still their teacher: *Let’s go over this one more time...* He “opens their minds to understanding the scriptures” — which is to say, prior to this eleventh-hour moment, even after all they had been through, the disciples’ minds were still closed. Perhaps we should not be so hard on ourselves, for our own doubts and questions in our life of faith.

You are witnesses. We forget the power of what we know. What we have heard. What we have seen. We are witnesses. And there is power in our witness. We witness the difficult and painful moments in our world. Go beyond the images you see online. Remember what you have seen with your own eyes with you own person. Last week I saw the grief of a family who woke up to the news that their son and brother had died in his sleep. Last week, I spoke to a woman who struggles to find her place in a world where she believes she is all alone. Over the weekend, I met a man who battles an addiction to alcohol who cannot see his life without a bottle for a companion. I have walked with members of the Police Department who see the very worst of what human beings can do to themselves and each other and keep showing up to workday after day. I have sat in the presence of a family in shock for the completed suicide of their dad without reason. I have walked the path to the Ash Garden with families who will say goodbye to their loved one, watching while a brother or a daughter lingers a little longer after the rest have turned to go home. I have witnessed these things and so have many of you.

Yes, we are witnesses to these things.

And also: We are witnesses to a rich life lived in more wondrous ways than we can imagine. We are witnesses to a world where we can give thanks to God for the healing of disease. We are witnesses to a time where we can communicate around the world in a matter of seconds. We are witnesses to a world where we are able, every-so-often, to see the very best of who we are in the actions of our sisters and brothers throughout the world who tend the broken, the fearful, the ones left to fend for themselves. In this time and place we are witnesses to a future, of what the world could look like, if only we saw each other as human beings worthy of care and respect and space and love. In other words, in small but powerful ways, every day in Jerusalem the disciples were witnesses to resurrection—if only their eyes were open to see it. We are witnesses to the feeding of the hungry, the visiting of the sick, the freedom of the oppressed – if only in small ways until we can speak to the powerful witness of the time when all are fed, and all are free. My friends,



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every day in Waukesha, Mukwonago, West Allis, Milwaukee, Oconomowoc, Pewaukee, and Wauwatosa we are witness to resurrection—if only our eyes are open to see it. If only our mouths were brave enough to proclaim it.

Hear again the Good News: As Jesus ascended into heaven to be with the Father, Jesus said: You are witnesses of these things. What a responsibility. And what an opportunity. Dear friends in Christ, dear people of the Resurrection: Whether you are in Jerusalem or this holy city of Waukesha. You are witnesses. You have stories to tell. You have hope to proclaim. You have love to share. You are witnesses because you have seen the Risen Lord. You have met him in the words of Scripture. You have met him on the streets of the city. You have known him in the breaking of bread and sharing of wine. You have seen him on Easter morning where we visited an empty tomb, heard women tell us the news, and proclaimed together, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!” You are witnesses of these things. And so today, on this mountain where Jesus ascended to the Father, we witnesses do not gather to mourn that we are alone. We celebrate that we are together! We rejoice that we have been given a voice, to proclaim what we have seen and known! We know the power of life over death, of resurrection over grave, of eternal life over the supposed finality of death. We have seen the Lord.

It would have been easier if Jesus had left his sandals behind - but we have something better - each other. If we cannot see his sandals, then we can look to find Jesus in the love and actions of each other and all who follow the Holy one of God, and that will be more than enough. Thanks be to God! Amen.