

Reflection: Ready to Begin Again

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

When I first created the Wednesday night schedule for Lent, the title for tonight's devotion was "Shoes for Escape." When I sat down to rework this night's reflection, I struggled as to whether the title still held the meaning I hoped to offer you.

My plan was to spend tonight reminding you that we are a people on the move. Always ready to begin again. And in order to be ready to begin – we need shoes for escape. In the days of the Exodus out of Egypt, the people of God had little control over their own lives. They lived and died by the command of Pharaoh. They had no say in their day-to-day activities. They went where they were told to go. They ate what was provided. They were slaves. They made mud bricks with their bare hands and lost loved ones to the torture of their Egyptian overlords. Their prayers seemed to go unanswered for generations. It would be 430 years of slavery before God would answer the prayers of the Israelites and send a deliverer to bring them out of Egypt. And when Moses finally secured their freedom – the Israelites were given a moment's notice. So quickly was their departure, that they pulled their bread from ovens still flat – because there was not enough time to let the dough rise. I wonder if you are feeling that way tonight? Ready to go at a moment's notice should the safer-at-home order be ended. I am pretty sure at whatever moment the order is lifted, there will be celebrating in the streets – with neighbors and friends gathering together as soon and as close as possible.

Until that time, I want to follow in the footsteps of our ancestors: clothes on (not pajamas or yoga pants), sandals on our feet, cellphone in hand – eating quickly so that we can begin the celebration – so that we can begin again. Somehow these days of Lent in the wilderness feel more like a death than a journey. If you give me time to reflect, I will argue that these days of Lent are both a death and a journey. I will tell you, that this week I am struggling. A friend of mine shared that he was finally at the breaking point – and before I passed judgment – I realized that I too was coming to my own breaking point. Strength for the journey – of course. God's Word to guide me – you bet. I can handle anything Lent throws at me. What I realized is that I have a far more difficult time handling what Lent has not throw at me this year. Roof leaks – I can get those fixed. Loved one dying – I can join you in your sorrow. Need more soup for a Wednesday night – I can make it or buy it or beg for it to be brought. No acolyte – any young one or old one can light candles. Not enough bulletins – I can steal and you can share. Too many baptisms – no problem – the service can run long. But what happens when the pastor who is used to doing everything is put on a safer-at-home order? Come on God – I've got my sandals on – I am ready to begin. And for now, it feels as if my prayers are falling on deaf ears. Lord, let me go back into the wilderness where your people are waiting and wandering. Let me touch, let me tend, let me love, let me laugh. All the things you have asked of me for much of my life – let me do them again Holy God.

I have tended from far away. I have prayed over people who have lost loved ones. I have given advice by email. I have suggested Scriptures for study. I am happy for each of those moments – but they pale in comparison to gathering with many of you in worship. In joining our voices in songs of praise – in speaking words of confession and creed – claiming God's promise and our faith with one voice. And the sharing of the peace – hugs and handshakes and high fives with the young ones at our knees. And finally, the gift of bread and wine – the gathering of the community to claim God's promise of life as one people through every time and place. And what I find most amusing is that for many of my colleagues – they have been complaining for so long about not being prepared for the church they are being called to serve today. And I smile, because not a single pastor was prepared for the moment when we were told we could no longer gather together for worship. And suddenly ten or twenty in worship doesn't seem so bad. And

suddenly finding it difficult to find a seat on a Sunday morning doesn't seem like such a big deal anymore. I am ready for all of the challenges to come – I am ready to begin again. I have sandals on my feet and I will happily rush through my meal Lord God – to let your people gather together once again.

What does the psalmist say, 'I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"' My friends, I will be glad and rejoice when the doors of this house of worship are opened to us once again to the great glory of God – but, for now, I will keep my sandals on my feet and wait for the Lord. And now may the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.