

Witness to the Word: FOOTSTEPS: To Serve is to Love

Grace and peace to you this day!

We've been together now for a few weeks and I hope you have enjoyed our walk together so far. It is my prayer that the witness to the word has been meaningful, the worship has drawn us each into the presence of God and one another, and that we are equipped to live differently as we are sent forth into the world.

We are engaged in a sermon series, 'Footsteps' that is designed to lead us into our journey together, to help me share who I am and how I got here, and to help us set a path forward into who we are as God's people and what we are called to do in ministry.

These two passages have been anchors for my call to ministry. In fact, they have anchored the family into which I have been born.

My father's family hails from Southern Maryland, people who arrived on the *Ark* & the *Dove* back in the 1600s to settle in the new land. There is a long history of farming. My grandfather was a tenant farmer on land held by the Catholic Church in Bowie. It is planted in houses now, but we all have copies of the pictures of Dad & his brothers cutting tobacco & hanging it to dry.

My mother's family originated in Germany and settled in Philadelphia. The Catholic Church had a strong influence on many in that time. As a result, serving in the church was a priority, whether as nuns, priests, or lay servants.

So the theme of working for others, through the church or in the community, runs strong in the family into which I have been born.

Though there are many special relatives, two great aunts, in particular, have influenced me. We knew them as the 'Undercover Nuns'. They were in the Dominican Order and were some of the first nuns to reject the cloistered life, wearing the Habit, and moved out to live among the people they were sent to serve. Their stories of serving the people, and their willingness to sponsor me in higher education, left indelible footprints on my path in life. Though I chose a different path, their support never wavered, even as I discerned the call to ordained ministry.

Our scripture lessons today are focused on living out our call as followers of Christ. We heard a clear expectation set by Jesus of what to do, and we heard a distinct directive of how to do it.

Familiar as they are, the 'foot washing' text is read on Holy Thursday and the 'conversation by the seaside' is usually read the third Sunday after Easter, it is essential that we interpret these passages with an eye to their contexts as well as our own current situation today.

In the first passage (John 13), Jesus begins his final teaching session. The writer clues us in that Jesus is aware that 'his hour has come'. There are spiritual forces at work,

and Jesus has much to share with his disciples. Actions speak louder than words... so Jesus lays down his garment, dons the towel, and begins to wash the dusty dirty feet of those gathered. He serves them, not as master/teacher but as slave/servant. Then he explains his actions and in later verses, issues a new standard of living as a follower... to love as I have loved you. Why? So that all will know you are mine(one of my disciples), you are of like mind (Phil 2) and one spirit! It is important to note that no one is excluded from the act of service... even the one who is to betray him has his feet washed... he is loved.

In the second passage (John 21), it is Jesus having conversation with Peter by the seaside. This is a post-resurrection story, confirming for the reader that Christ is alive, and able to act and love even in new life. The disciples had fished all night without a catch, and in obeying the command to drop nets on the other side, haul in a most abundant catch. They have breakfast on the beach, and this conversation occurs.

In this conversation, Peter affirms his love and loyalty for Jesus. Jesus, in persisting with the query, 'Do you love me' follows each affirmation with a directive to care (feed & tend) for those who follow, the lambs, the flock, the sheep.

There is more than the literal directive, however.

This conversation tells us that we, too, are expected to follow.

We are called to follow:

- in spite of our missteps, where we've been, what we've done, what we've said;
- that we, like Peter, can be restored to full partnership in serving in this world;
- that we, as is Peter, will be reconciled to full kin-ship in the Family of God through Jesus Christ.

Peter, like each of us, has a call to follow. Peter responded. The book of Acts tells us that.

What then are we to do? Where our footsteps take us on this journey?

Let us begin by reflecting on: what we are already engaged in doing... who we are engaged in serving.

Then let us also consider: those who are not yet served... who is our neighbor that may need feeding or tending?

As we walk together in this journey, let us take time to pause, listen, and see who God is calling us to serve and how we might Share, by word and by action, I love you, but God loves you more! Amen!