

“Dusty feet”
Westminster Presbyterian Church
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Luke 10:1-11

by Rev. Patrick D. Heery

One Sunday morning a pastor decided to skip church. It was a beautiful, sunny day, and he decided he was going golfing. He told his church he wasn't feeling well, and drove to a golf course in another city, so nobody would know him. He teed off on the first hole. A huge gust of wind caught his ball, carried it an extra hundred yards and dropped it right in the hole, for a 450 yard hole-in-one. It was the best he had ever done! He couldn't believe it!

Neither could the angels in heaven. One of the angels looked at God and said, “What'd you do that for?”

God simply smiled and said, “Who's he going to tell?”

I guess a hole-in-one just isn't the same when you can't share it with anyone. The same might be said for ministry. Today, Jesus sends his disciples out in pairs, to lean on each other as friends. They're going to need each other; they've got some tough work to do.

It strikes me as important that while we have just celebrated our Independence Day, Jesus commissions his disciples for interdependence—for what the Rev. Dr. King called a “network of mutuality,” in which each is dependent on the other.

That's a radical concept in a world where most folks' idea of success is not needing help from anyone. Jesus sends his disciples into the world unprotected: no money, no extra clothing or food, not even sandals.

They arrive with their feet caked in hot sand, blistered and aching—dependent on the kindness of strangers. They arrive as countless peoples have come to our own shores: “tired... poor... huddled masses yearning to be free... the homeless, the tempest-tossed.” They are to find a family that will take them in. They are to enter this house and proclaim “Peace.” They are to heal the sick and teach about the kingdom of God, about a harvest of such abundance that we should see one another, not as threats, but as blessings, because we need every laborer we can get.

Jesus is aware, however, that this vulnerability comes at a cost. The kingdom of God may be a harvest, planted with love. But the world is still choked with weeds, with those who refuse to believe, with those who would fear and hurt their neighbor. Jesus foresees that his disciples shall be like lambs among wolves. They shall encounter closed doors, and worse, closed hearts.

Yet still Jesus counsels vulnerability. If the choice is lamb or wolf, he would have them be lambs.

But even a lamb need not be silent. If a town rejects them, they are to go out into the streets and publicly wipe the dust from their feet in protest. Now that might seem like a silly, inadequate response. “Ooooh... dust... I’m so scared.” But to wipe the dust from their feet is to show that this community has failed its sacred duty, its highest law, to show hospitality to the stranger. If the town had been a good host, they would have washed the feet of their guests, and there would have been no dust to shake (cf. Mikeal Parsons). Such a community—Jesus goes on to say—shall be like Sodom, like all cities of power and privilege that fail to show hospitality to the stranger and meet them instead with violence. Such a community shall be consumed by its own greed and destructiveness.

In wiping their feet, however, the disciples offer more than indictment; they offer hope. In wiping their feet, the disciples unequivocally declare: “We persist.” No hate or rejection, no cynicism or apathy can stop them from taking another step forward. Their dusty feet will proclaim the love of God with every step they take. They are kingdom-bound, and they will not be deterred.

By giving up all the things that provided an illusion of solitary strength, even those sandals, they discovered that true power is in community, with God and neighbor. Only together will the harvest be gathered.

I wonder: Might there be such dusty feet among the thousands of refugees crowding our borders? Might there be among them an apostle, a persistent messenger, here to proclaim peace and teach us the kingdom of God? Might there be an opportunity for us to wipe the feet of Christ?

Surely, all who come are God’s children. And surely all, by their mere presence, teach us about interdependence and hospitality. They seek the harvest and are prepared to labor. They seek a better world for their children, and wish to be a part of building that world. They flee the wolves of poverty and violence. The fact that there might be a few wolves among them should not make us become wolves as well.

The process by which we discover the best approaches to immigration law are, no doubt, complicated, with thoughtful people on all sides.

But when we close our borders and our hearts to these refugees, when we separate children from their parents, when cells designed for 55 people hold 135 till there is no room left to sit or lie down or breathe, when children are caged and denied medical care, are sick and hungry, without soap or toothbrushes, when almost none have been allowed to bathe, when rhetoric fuels hate and xenophobia, we must ask ourselves: are we the wolves? Are we the cities, like Sodom, that deny welcome and refuge to God’s messengers? What harvest are we missing?

I have seen Jesus lying face down in the muddy waters of the Rio Grande, in the lifeless bodies of a 23-month-old girl and her father, their bodies intertwined, the child still clinging to her father—Salvadoran migrants who fled violence, corruption, and poverty, only to find the way closed. They came here seeking legal asylum, only to discover a government that has cut off funding and limited the process, creating a huge backlog of cases, leaving families exposed for months without means of survival. Desperate, they tried a dangerous path into the country. They, like thousands of others, died doing so.

Her name was Valeria, and her father was Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez. They had dreams of their own, peace of their own, that we will now never know.

Perhaps you think I'm stretching the text, putting something there that isn't really there. Yet, in this very chapter, Jesus goes on to teach a parable about despised foreigners and unexpected neighbors, a parable about hospitality neglected out of fear and ideology, a story about love and helping someone in need even when it's dangerous. The Parable of the Good Samaritan.

There is hope yet. We can persist in our faith in God. We can persist in our love of neighbor. We can march these dusty feet with the dusty feet of all who seek refuge. We can open our lives to them, and join the harvest together. We can call our representatives. We can speak till the world listens. We can donate to those providing humanitarian and legal aid. We can join protests and vigils. We can be foster parents for unaccompanied refugee minors. We can volunteer. We can offer sanctuary. Or... we can be left in the dust. **Amen.**