

Barefoot

Pentecost 13 2017

Exodus 3:1-15, Romans 12:19-21, Matthew 16:21-28

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In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

On Thursday night, people gathered in Kerry Park downtown to mark International Overdose Awareness Day. There were events earlier that day and various programs and interviews on CBC radio. There was lots to be said about the overdose epidemic and fentanyl crisis, about types and availability of treatment and care, but what was striking was the repeated call for us to change our cultural assumption: people with addictions are not criminals but rather people who need help and compassion. While for some of us this is obvious, but from a societal perspective, this is a massive change in culturally conditioned assumptions that asks us to get rid of those habits and look right in to the eyes and hearts of suffering people.

This morning we are gifted with incredible readings from Exodus, Romans and the Gospel of Matthew. I remember once being part of a discussion on Moses' encounter with the burning bush and people were puzzling over why Moses had to take off his shoes. Moses starts off by saying he needs to look right at this odd and miraculous and holy thing, this paradox of a bush that is burning but will not burn. God calls to him from this bush and says 'Moses, Moses take off yours shoes'. In that discussion, I learned that Rabbinic tradition suggests that the shoes represent habits. All of the things to which we have become habituated or culturally conditioned; the things we no longer examine, things that protect but obstruct us from seeing the holy, from being present to and with the holiness of God in our midst in a two feet planted in the dirt kind of way. Only once Moses has removed his shoes does God name God's self as the One who perpetually is, the God of all of his forefathers. Only once Moses takes off his shoes can he be sent into the suffering of the people in Egypt carrying the name of the Great I AM.

Holding this interpretation of Moses and his shoes along side our Gospel reading this morning gives us some interesting parallels. Just last week we heard Peter name Jesus as the Holy One, the great I AM incarnate. Since then, scripture says, Jesus has been showing his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering be killed, and on the third day be raised. This is the ultimate paradox, even more so than a burning bush: the Messiah must suffer, God's power will be shown in weakness, life comes out of death. And while Peter has named the Messiah, his conditioned assumptions about what the Messiah should be keep him from understanding. He rebukes Jesus and then Jesus rebukes him: 'you've got your mind on human things, not on divine things.' You haven't taken off your shoes yet. Jesus then tells his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." Those who hang

on to the habits and assumptions that save their life on the surface will lose their lives. And those who lose their life- step out barefoot into the paradox of the holy- will find their lives.

Our Christian tradition runs deep with beautiful, ancient spiritual practices that help us take off our shoes, steadily check our assumptions and lived habits against the God who became incarnate, was crucified and was raised. One of those traditions is called the Examen Prayer (like to examine). There are different versions of it: short ones that help you look closely at what has happened within a day and others that are meant to help you look thoroughly into your heart of hearts. Our reading from Paul's letter to the church in Rome today is a bit like an Examen for that community and for us. I'll just read a few of them and invite you prayerfully hold them as a light on your life, as light upon the conditioned assumptions our culture carries:

Let love be genuine...

Bless those who persecute you...

Weep with those who weep

Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly...

Do not claim to be wiser than you are...

Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink....

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Stand barefoot before those you love, those you don't, those who are addicted, those who are your neighbours, those who are drastically different, stand barefoot because in you and in them God is working and it is the holiness of love that will reveal Christ most clearly.

Amen.