

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2024 B

Sometime this morning, you put on your shoes. What was on your mind? For the most part we don't think much about it at all. Shoes are shoes and off we go. When Jesus sends the Twelve, He would seem to be a poor trip planner: travel light and rely on God to provide for your needs. So, no luggage, food, money, extra clothes. But where the other Gospels also list sandals as something to leave behind, Mark very specifically includes them. Curious minds might wonder why.

Remember that when Moses encountered God in the burning bush on Mount Sinai, he was told: *"Come no nearer. Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place you are standing is holy ground."* Moses taking off his sandals implied a couple of things. First, this was a common cultural gesture of respect and humility. But *even more, removing his sandals put Moses in touch with that holy ground.* He was being invited from understandable human fear and confusion in front of that fiery plant into a deeper union with the living God.

So for Mark, the Twelve's sandals imply that they are on their way to holiness, *but they have not yet arrived.* They have a journey to make by sharing in Jesus' own work from the Father. They are *missionary disciples, chosen and sent.* We see this same call in those from our ACC who are leaving this week for Alaska ... chosen and sent with the Gospel, not to bring it there but to find it already at work in another part of the one Body of Christ.

For the Twelve, that first evangelization trial run probably didn't take them very far in miles, but it took them out of themselves, leaving the reliable and the routine to go where Jesus sent them, tramping along in their sandals. *The same Jesus also chooses us, asks us to support one another, and sends us into the world* – for most of us, not far in miles, but still an intentional journey, sent to announce Christ's Gospel and not our own ideas, inspired by the promise of every spiritual blessing in the heavens.

God may call us in exceptional circumstances and send us to unknown places. But most often, we are sent right back into the same people, the same responsibilities, the same problems and obstacles, the same opportunities that we brought with us when we walked into church in our sandals and shoes. ***It is in those ordinary times of life that the Word of God most needs to be spoken.*** When we focus on our blessings rather than complaints; when we see with patience and empathy rather than rushing to judgment; when we encourage rather than find fault; when we take time to do a kindness; when we offer a silent prayer rather than cataloguing our grievances – it is to such places and moments that we are sent. They may seem trivial compared to the problems of the world. But while we might hope we will be able to rise to great occasions and witness to our faith in crucial moments, there are vastly more of these small, ordinary events in life. We are all traveling through the same day; when our paths cross, we can either make it a little bit better for another, or a little bit worse.

So, back to your shoes. Perhaps the Apostles never quite thought of their sandals in the same way after Jesus sent them to evangelize their neighbors and friends. We may never know in this life what a difference a kind word and a thoughtful gesture might make for someone who needs a sign of God's love in that moment. When you put on your shoes this week, remember: I am not simply going to work, or to the store, or to pick up the kids, or to a friend's house ... ***I have been chosen, and I am being sent by Jesus, on my way to holy ground.***