

John 14:8-17, 25-27

June 9, 2019

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

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.

Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.

Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,
other times there were one set of footprints.

This bothered me because I noticed
that during the low periods of my life,
when I was suffering from
anguish, sorrow or defeat,
I could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord,
"You promised me Lord,
that if I followed you,
you would walk with me always.
But I have noticed that during
the most trying periods of my life
there have only been one
set of footprints in the sand.
Why, when I needed you most,
you have not been there for me?"

The Lord replied,
"The times when you have
seen only one set of footprints,
is when I carried you."ⁱ

I suspect a show of hands would reveal a vast majority of you know the title of the poem I just read. In fact, I would fathom a guess many of you might be able to

recite much of that poem from memory. The title of the poem is, “Footprints in the Sand,” by Mary Stevenson. I have made many a home visit over the years and noticed that poem hanging on a wall or encased in a frame and placed upon the shelf of a curio cabinet or upon a nearby table. Several people have shared with me how it has helped them to realize the Lord’s presence with them even when they initially had not.

I often find that to be true myself. Yes, even pastors wrestle at times to see the presence of Christ in our lives or the lives of others. Yet, there are moments in our lives I believe the circumstances with which we find ourselves may make it a bit more challenging to readily see God’s presence. Moments, such as the poem highlights, are the low periods of our lives, when we find ourselves in anguish, sorrow, or defeat. It is often, in these times, our senses may be overcome by a state of grief, fear, anxiety, or even incomprehension of what it is we are experiencing. As a result, we simply may not have the ability, on our own, to readily see, feel, or put into words where Christ is present meeting us and carrying us forward into the light of a new day.

And that is where we need the help and guidance of another to proclaim the promise made by Jesus in John’s gospel account to his disciples, who too, find themselves in a rather difficult situation. Let’s not forget where we are in John’s gospel – still gathered around the table on the night before Jesus’ death. The disciples just had their feet washed by Jesus, which I suspect their minds were still trying to grasp this act of service and love by their teacher, which ran so counter to cultural norms. Jesus had just told them he would be departing from them and where he was going, they could not come. Their heads must have been spinning out of control. Is it really any wonder Philip desires Jesus to show them the Father? We may smirk a bit wondering how this could be so of these disciples who have been with Jesus for three years and had a first-hand account of the signs (aka miracles) he performed. Yet, perhaps they are, for those who follow, a reflection of life in the flesh and the challenges that come with it at times.

It is into this disbelief and lack of understanding Jesus gives them a promise. He gives them hope that when he leaves, and they seemingly see only one set of footprints in the sand and think they are alone – they will not be. He will send to them his Spirit to continue teaching in Jesus’ name and reminding them of all he has said to them.

Today is Pentecost Sunday and we are accustomed on this day to recollect the coming of the Spirit as told by Luke in the second chapter of Acts. A rather moving

story rich with imagery of the Spirit coming through the violent rush of wind, or as tongues of fire resting upon them causing all gathered to speak in their native tongue and be understood by all. The Spirit's presence is sudden, unexpected, awe-inspiring, and dramatic. I believe many Christians long for an experience such as this and perhaps when it doesn't come, they question their faith or God's activity and presence in their lives and the community of faith of which they are part of.

But our lectionary also gives to us John's gospel account of the sending of the Holy Spirit. It's seems rather mundane. There is nothing flashy about it. It's just the disciples gathered around the table with Jesus as he continues to teach them, be with them, serve them, and love them. John doesn't really give us any hint of what that Spirit will look like. It's just sheer promise by Jesus that the Spirit of Truth will descend upon the people of God. They will not be alone.

Talk of the Spirit is challenging. Within our Lutheran tradition, the Holy Spirit is probably the most least talked about member of the Triune nature of God (i.e., Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). It is perhaps the one we struggle the most to comprehend and describe.

Yet, John's gospel holds true for my journey of faith and perhaps for yours as well. That is, the Holy Spirit, is often not encountered and made visible through violent rushes of wind or mystical tongues of flames resting upon foreheads. No, the Spirit is quietly at work in my life, even when I may not readily comprehend her presence. The Spirit is carrying me through the trials and tribulations of life without me even recognizing it until later when that same Spirit gives me the eyes to see the Lord's presence with me through people, scripture, sacraments, songs, poems, and the strength I never knew I had to persevere through those times. That when there were only one set of footprints in the sand they were not mine but those of the Word made flesh whom came to dwell among us, give his life for us, and be raised from the dead for us so that we may have new life. Jesus' promise to the disciples holds true, we are not alone. His Spirit is a gift to us that abides in us and guides us through whatever it is we experience in this life.

ⁱ "Footprints in the Sand", Mary Stevenson, from <http://www.footprints-in-the-sand.com/index.php?page=Main.php>