

## Taking Off Your Sandals

Jane and I are beach people. Throughout our forty three year marriage we have spent many hours on the south Jersey beaches. For years I have watched as people step onto the sand of the beach and immediately their shoes come off. They long to stand barefoot on the Holy Ground of the beach and let the sand ooze through their toes. It calms their spirit, lowers their blood pressure and gets them in touch with the wind and the waves of the beach.

A few days ago, Jane, Ian and I were walking on a path over the dune toward the beach. I noticed a strange sight. At the juncture between the concrete sidewalk and the sand of the path lay an abandoned pair of shoes. The owner of the shoes apparently slipped them off and proceeded barefoot on the sand toward the waves.

It should come as no surprise that I was struck by the words God speaks to Moses in today's Bible reading. "Take off your sandals you're standing on Holy Ground". Today we read the story of Moses encounter with God in the burning bush while he was in the midst of his shepherding duties. The story is a wonderful tale of revelation, transformation and invitation. Revelation; because God reveals God's self and his name to Moses. Transformation; because God transforms a stuttering Moses into a commanding leader of the Jews. And Invitation because God invites Moses into a new mission in life; leading the Jews from slavery to freedom. And it happens all because Moses was willing to heed God's command to remove his sandals.

So what is this removing of sandals all about? Why does God urge Moses to remove his sandals? Most scholars believe that in the ancient world filled with dusty and dirty paths and deserts; feet and sandals had become synonymous with all that is dirty or unclean about us. Remember Jesus washed the disciple's feet. To remove one's sandals was a sign of humility and respect. Being barefoot leaves one vulnerable. Just ask any parent who has walked through their child's darkened room and stepped on a Lego block. Moses is urged to remove his sandals because he is in the presence of God...standing on Holy Ground.

This morning I invite you to consider just where it is in your life that you find Holy Ground? Where is the burning bush near you? Where is it in your life that you should in humility, respect and vulnerability remove your sandals because you are in the presence of God?

Notice that for Moses his Holy Ground was not found in the temple or at some holy grotto or sacred site. That's good news for those of us who find ourselves separated from our places of worship. Moses encountered God in the world; more specifically Moses encountered God in the midst of his daily life; in a burning bush. He spotted the burning bush while he was shepherding. Perhaps there is a message there for us. God can be found in all sorts of burning bushes, unexpected places...our whole faith reminds us that God comes in the earthly and unexpected. God can be found in a tiny baby, a wooden cross, an empty tomb, a bowl of water,

a loaf of bread and a chalice of wine. Perhaps your burning bush and your holy ground is found in your work place, your family room, your backyard, your marriage, your hobby. Perhaps the key to seeing God and encountering God in our daily life involves removing our sandals in humility, respect and vulnerability.

Also notice that for Moses in removing his sandals he signals his willingness to go deeper in relationship with God. In respect, vulnerability and humility Moses learns more about God and more about himself. He discovers who God is; that God is a God of compassion, a God who hates oppression, a God who loves and cares for God's people. Moses also learns more about himself. He discovers that God intends, despite his lifelong disability with stuttering to make Moses a leader and to lead the Jews to freedom.

Isn't the same true for you and me? When we remove our sandals long enough to approach God in humility, vulnerability and respect; don't we come to a deeper understanding of who God is and how God loves? Don't we like Moses discover how God can use us despite our weakness and disabilities to serve and help others? God has always and continues to heal this broken world using broken and humble people. Take off your sandals and discover who God is calling you to be and what God is calling you to do with your life.

Finally, don't miss the irony that in removing his sandals Moses began a lifelong journey of adventure with God. A journey that would take Moses and his sandals from the oppression of Egypt to the freedom on a new land of milk and honey; a journey filled with signs and wonders like, the parting of the sea, water from a rock, and manna from heaven. Moses life was transformed because he paused long enough to remove his sandals and talk with God.

Is it really any different for us? God is still transforming the hearts and minds of God's people. When we pause long enough to remove our sandals and spend time in God's presence; God can begin to mold us, shape us and form us into a new man or new woman. God has adventures and journeys for us we could never envision. But ironically the journey begins when we take off our sandals; when we approach God's Holy Ground in deep respect, with a humble spirit, open and vulnerable to what God wants to teach and show us. God is still in the business of placing burning bushes in our lives; especially in places where we would least expect to see them. Open your eyes, open your heart and take off your sandals; God wants to have a word with you about your life, your mission and your future. Amen