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## *These Shoes Were Made For Preaching*

**A sermon by Canon Lauren Holder**  
**Proper 16 – Year B**

I love our reading from Ephesians today. It's one of the lessons designated for when the church celebrates the life and ministry of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I know that because that weekend in January happens to be when I was ordained a priest, so the scriptures read at my ordination were the scriptures we use to remember Dr. King, and they were preached by the bishop who brought me up in the priesthood, Bishop Michael Curry.

Now Bishop Curry didn't preach on Paul's letter to the Ephesians that day, so I'm afraid I can't borrow from his sermon.

But at the time, and still today, Paul's words struck me as being so very practical. Specifically, I'm referring to Paul's suggestion of footwear for preachers. We have these somewhat abstract wardrobe descriptions when talking about the armor of God: belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the spirit—being the word of God. But for shoes? “whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.” The possibilities are endless! For a long time, the most comfortable pair of dress shoes I owned were bright red. And after reading this passage, they became my preaching shoes. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately) I wore a hole in said shoes just as I was coming to the Cathedral. And so I had to find a new pair of preaching shoes.

Now just in case you think Paul is being a little eccentric here, it's helpful to note that the prophet Isaiah also spoke of preachers' feet. Indeed a whole section of Handel's Messiah is based on Isaiah's words, “how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace.”

Why? Why this focus on feet? Why not the mouth, the tongue, the lungs, or the mind? Why feet?

Well one obvious truism comes to mind: “Actions speak louder than words.” Or even the quote sometimes attributed to St. Francis, “Preach the gospel always; when necessary use words.”

When Jesus proclaims in our Gospel today that “those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me,” two things come to my mind. First, in the Hebrew tradition, the words “flesh and blood” taken together meant the whole person. Jesus is *offering his whole self*. Second, the term abide does not mean to stand still, but invites movement. It invites us to return to Jesus again and again and again, like the planets orbiting the sun. And furthermore, Jesus is always on the move! If we are to remain with Jesus, we have to be on the move too. No wonder the disciples said this was a hard teaching. It's a workout!

My friends. I stand in a room full of preachers. And as much fun as it might be to start an open mic night, I want us instead to consider what kind of shoes we need to preach the gospel of peace. What do your preaching shoes look like? Do they have a lot of miles on them, or are the soles still slippery from lack of wear? Are your shoes made for walking, for off-roading? Or are they made to look pretty? Do they even fit you? Or do you perhaps need a new pair?

I mentioned the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. earlier. Dr. King had a list of commitments that fellow demonstrators were asked to pledge themselves to in non-violence. The first commitment was to meditate daily on the life and teachings of Jesus. Other commitments included daily prayer, maintaining spiritual and physical health, and walking in love since God is love. Dr. King's words ring true today, just as Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus rings true—because the message

is timeless.

We are all called to preach. What do your shoes say about your vocation as a preacher in this world, about your daily efforts to abide in Christ and walk in love?

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