

Walking in someone else's shoes



By Judy Taylor



Recently at Holy Trinity, Mark reflected on the gospel reading “Increase our faith” from Luke 17 5-10. Jesus had begun to address a large crowd which included the Pharisees and scribes no doubt there to try and catch him out. Jesus’ stories covering faith, forgiveness, obedience and love were told in parables and the apostles having listened to all of these implored Jesus to increase their faith. Mark went on to talk about St Francis of Assisi and the two incidents that profoundly showed how he lived out his faith by his actions. The story of Francis giving his cloak to a beggar and embracing a leper then living among them is truly an act of courage and faith because he was in fact “walking in someone else’s shoes”.

To walk in someone else's shoes is to pause our own journey and step into theirs—to feel their burdens, joys, fears, and hopes. As Christians, this isn't just a moral suggestion; it's a divine calling.

Jesus Himself modeled this perfectly. The incarnation—God becoming man—is the ultimate act of walking in our shoes. He didn't just observe humanity from afar; He entered into it. He felt hunger, betrayal, grief, and love.

Love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:31)

This commandment isn't passive. It demands action. Loving someone as yourself means imagining their pain as your own, their struggles as your own, their story as your own. It means listening without judgment, serving without expectation, and forgiving without condition.

Bearing One Another's Burdens

Galatians 6:2 says:

“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Walking in someone's shoes might mean sitting with them in silence, standing up for them in courage, or simply being present in their suffering. It's not always comfortable—but it's always what God would want us to do.

Of course, we can never really know how another person is feeling because we have not had **their** life experiences, good and bad which form the building blocks of our opinions and thinking in other words, of our story.

I have a pair of shoes which I love but hardly ever wear because they hurt my feet yet I can't let them go! Maybe this is also a lesson for this reflection, wearing another's shoes would mean that they would almost certainly be uncomfortable. We would not want to walk very far in them and they may not be the style of shoe we would choose. Maybe they are well worn, shabby even and what would that say about us? So, staying the distance, overcoming the discomfort we may feel, and putting aside thoughts of how it might look to others if we associate ourselves with someone who is very often outside the boundaries of "polite society" - yes it is a lot to ask.

But what about the one who walks in our shoes? He does not hesitate to enter wholly into them and as he walks with us he is trying all the time to make these shoes feel more comfortable for us. He will go the distance no matter how hard the terrain and he does not care at all about our physical appearance he only cares and loves us so deeply as he looks into our heart. He went further than we can ever imagine, wearing the shoes of the outcast, of those whose shoes had never fitted properly so their lives were never fulfilled and the shoes of those of us who often fail to put our own comfort aside and walk alongside others and... those who had no shoes. All these shoes he took to the cross, laying them lovingly before God as He sacrificed everything for them "us".

I'd like to finish by telling you of a story I came across which echoes St. Francis' example of living out faith in action.

An American teacher was employed in Japan on the understanding that during school hours he should not utter a word on the subject of Christianity. The engagement was faithfully kept, and he lived before his students the Christian life but never spoke of it to them. Not a word was said to influence the young men committed to his care. But so beautiful was his character, and so blameless his example that forty of the students, unknown to him, met in a grove and signed a secret covenant to abandon idolatry. Twenty-five of them entered the Kyoto Christian Training School and some of them are now preaching the gospel which their teacher had unconsciously commended. (Anon)