

Waiting Expectantly

Luke 3:7-18

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December 13, 2015

John the Baptist left quite a footprint. His preaching was memorable. Chastising people as a brood of vipers and conjuring images of an axe being laid at the root of the trees, he called the people to repent, to change their ways, to turn and go in a new direction. God honored his preaching. He left quite a footprint. People who had two coats shared with those who had none. Tax collectors only collected what was fair and just. Soldiers gave up robbing and using violence and making false accusations. Lives were changed and the change left such a footprint, made such an impact, the people began to say, “Maybe John the Baptist is the one for whom we have been waiting. Maybe he is the Anointed One. Maybe John the Baptist is the Christ.” Look at his footprint, the good he has done and the change he has brought.

But John would have none of it. No matter what footprint he left, he knew the one coming, God’s Anointed One, the Messiah, his footprint could not be matched. “The one who is coming is mightier than I. I am not even worthy to untie the thong of his sandals.” You think I left a footprint? Just wait. Just wait.”

John expected the coming one, the Messiah, to leave some amazing and unforgettable footprint. Why would he expect anything else? Think of the footprint God left in the sky, the patterns of the sun and moon and stars, the majesty and the glory of the heavens. Think of the footprint God left on the roaring waves of the ocean and the soaring heights of the mountains, the cascading waterfalls and gently rolling meadows. God knows how to leave a footprint. Boy did he leave some footprints in the Old Testament.

- Boom! He set his mighty foot in the middle of the Red Sea and he struck the water with such force it split in two and the people walked on dry land.
- Boom! His foot crashed down in the desert and it rained manna for forty years.
- Boom! He stepped with authority on Mount Sinai and out came two stone tablets that held the words of the covenant.
- Boom! He stamped that terrible foot outside the walls of Jericho and before you knew it those walls came tumblin' down.
- Boom! The sun went back ten steps on the stairway.
- Boom! The prophets of Baal went up in smoke.

God leaves a mighty footprint. And now the Messiah is coming? Now the Anointed One is about to step into the ring of human affairs? John the Baptist looks at his footprint, impressive though it may be, and he tells the people I am not the one. Oh no, when you see his footprint you will know. And so it seems, doesn't it? Jesus walks to the River Jordan and steps into the waters of baptism. In response to that footprint in the waters of baptism the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son; with him I am well pleased."

- Boom! He left a footprint in the Jordan River. And then...
- Boom! He was driving out demons and ministering late in the night as the whole town came out to him.
- Boom! The nets of fishermen were filled and something about that footprint led them to leave behind the greatest catch they ever had...so they could follow Jesus, so they could follow his footprints as he led them to new life.
- Boom! A few loaves and fish are turned into a feast that fed 5,000.
- Boom! He walked on the water.
- Boom! He calmed the storm.
- Boom! He preached and everyone marveled at the authority of his words.

Jesus left a mighty footprint, and in many ways it was just what John hoped for, just what the crowds had been waiting for. But something else was happening. He was leaving footprints that were unexpected, and it must have been puzzling to people. If you can feed the multitudes and calm the storms and drive out demons, then set your face to Jerusalem. Boom! Boom! Boom! Make a trail of footprints that gets you to where the action is, right to Jerusalem, and then Boom! Boom! Boom...establish your kingdom and squash every one of your rivals. That is the footprint we all want to see.

While the people were hoping for that type of a footprint this man named Jesus, Jesus who is the Son of God, was making a whole other set of footprints. They weren't the loud and thumping footprints like armies marching and Red Seas parting and Jericho walls falling, but if you paid close attention these other footprints were really quite amazing, really quite incredible, really quite precious. He left a trail of footprints that went right up to a leper, and then to a lame man, from there to a deaf person and soon up to a blind man and into the house of a Pharisee where a woman with a broken heart took those feet in her hands and bathed them with tears and anointed them with oil, and every one of these strange encounters left a footprint that said this great and mighty God cares for the hurting, the wounded, the lost, and the lonely. Many times people in those situations feel exactly the opposite, that God has steered clear of their suffering, walked around or away from their sadness and despair. But with Jesus there was no doubt. It happened too often, for too many people, in places that were too public, for anyone to miss the significance. And if you did miss the significance of the footprints he was right there to explain it. "I have come to seek and to save the lost."

He even told a tender story about what type of footprints he came to leave. They are the footprints of a shepherd who goes off in search of one lost sheep. They are the footprints of a woman who wanders throughout her house, pacing back and forth just in the hopes of finding one lost coin. Just in case we thought he was only talking about sheep and coins he then said his footprints were of a father who walked day after day out to the front of his house, looking longingly down the path, awaiting, hoping, longing for the return of his lost child. The footprints literally wore a path of love and devotion into the ground.

One day he did decide to set his face toward Jerusalem. One day he did decide to leave a set of footprints that went straight to the heart, straight to Jerusalem. What a footprint it was when he rode into town on Palm Sunday to shouts of Hosanna and blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. He went into the Temple. He left a mighty big footprint when he turned over the tables of the moneychangers.

As dramatic as those footprints were, it is another set of footprints he left on that visit to Jerusalem that changed the course of this world. It is so easy to trace his footprints, the voice from heaven, the healings, the miracles, the power, the authority and to say yes, this is definitely the Son of God. Maybe because it is so clear that he is God's Beloved Son the footprints he left in Jerusalem seem to be all wrong. They take him to a Garden where he prays anguished prayers about God removing the cup. The footprints show he is arrested and brought to judgment. The footprints take him through ridicule, beatings, taunting, a cruel game of dress up where he is fitted with a robe and a crown of thorns, and finally a sentence of crucifixion. No longer do we hear a mighty Boom! As he makes his way up the hill of Calvary his footprints are slow and plodding, carrying a load much heavier than a wooden cross. It turns out he was carrying the weight of a broken and sinful world. On that hill he not only suffered, he died. His footprints came to an abrupt end. A man named Joseph of Arimathea took his dead body and laid it in a tomb.

What comes next is the part we love best. You see, after he was laid in that tomb, after his footprints had ended in agony, defeat, shame and death, it turns out he wasn't through leaving his footprint on this earth. Talk about Boom! Boom! Boom! Those first steps out of the grave on Easter morning have resounded through the ages. Those first steps have left a footprint of hope, and healing, and joy, and promises of life and new beginnings.

I love the footprints that show God's power and might. Let those footprints resound and shake the foundations of this earth. I also am aware of the incredible blessing that awaits us each and every day. You see, it might be, in fact it often is, that the footprints of Jesus will come right to the door of our lives. His footprints are seen even now in hospital rooms and in maternity wards, Jesus himself standing beside the ones who are ill and Jesus himself wrapping a newborn babe in his arms of love. His footprints cross the thresholds of our homes. He is there when the fires of love and family burn bright. He is there when there are tears and hard words. His footprints come and they never leave, whether times are good or bad. Maybe today you will look down and see that those footprints have come right up to your side. He comes to your side because he cares. He comes to your side because he loves. He comes to your side because you are his beloved child. But don't let him stay at your side. Invite him in. Let him leave the most important set of footprints there will ever be in your life. Let him into your heart. Let him make a footprint there, a footprint that says you are my child, and I love you with an everlasting love. You belong to me, and I will never let you go.

Boom! Boom! Boom! He is here. Even now he is here. His footprints lead right up to the door of your heart. O that every person in this whole wide world would let him in. O that his footprint would be stamped on our hearts, a sign of God's eternal love.