

“Jesus went...”
Luke 4:38-44
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Jesus went...In one form or another each of the gospels is filled with the comings and goings of Jesus of Nazareth. This morning our scripture tells us Jesus left where he was and went to the home of Simon. As so often happened when Jesus went, there was a person in need. This time it was Simon's mother-in-law. She was sick and suffering from a high fever. Jesus rebuked the fever and she became better. She rose and began to wait on all the company. By the end of the day people had come from everywhere to be healed by Jesus. This particular story sets the stage for the future goings of Jesus, as he resists letting his ministry become one strictly devoted to healing. He says, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom, because that is why I was sent.”

Jesus went...on this particular day he went to the home of Simon. Where he went is really a microcosm of human life. He went to other places. Jesus went to church when he went to the synagogue. He went and faced temptation when he went to the desert. He went to weddings, and he went to funerals. He went to baptisms with the people seeking religion and he went to the home of tax collectors and sinners who spent most of their time running from religion. Jesus went to quiet and remote places, and he went right into the heart of the action, entering cities and rubbing shoulders with the jostling crowds.

One of the great affirmations of the Christian faith is that Jesus is fully God and fully human. His miraculous birth, the voice from heaven at his baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration, the signs and miracles he performed, and the empty grave that spoke of his resurrection from the dead are all marks of his divinity. What are the signs of his humanity? Aren't they present everywhere he went and with every situation he was faced. Jesus rejoiced with those who rejoiced and wept with those who wept. In Hebrews we read, “Humans have flesh and blood, so Jesus too shared in our humanity...He was made like us in

every way...including suffering and being tempted.” (Hebrews 2:14-18)
Another way of putting it is that Jesus walked a mile in our shoes.

On this Christmas Day, as we think about the Jesus who went...I'd like to spend a few minutes thinking about Jesus walking a mile in our shoes. If Jesus walked a mile in our shoes, does that mean that he once wore a pair of booties? Did his tiny infant feet slide into a cute pair of handmade booties? Our Lord and Savior entered our world as a human, fully human, and so yes, he wore the shoes of an itsy bitsy baby boy. He experienced what it is to be helpless and completely dependent on the love and care of others.

If Jesus walked a mile in our shoes, he must have had quite a collection of shoes. He had a pair of shoes appropriate for each and every occasion that allowed him to walk a mile in our shoes.

- He had a nice pair of water shoes, just right for stepping into the Jordan River and letting the cleansing floods of baptism engulf him.
- He had a pair of desert shoes, able to walk the long and trying trip of 40 days when the devil tempted and tested him. Those must have been a rugged set of shoes.
- Jesus had a pair of church shoes, just for those Sabbath days when he would enter the synagogue to preach and teach and to do works of healing and drive out the demons.
- He had his religious shoes for the synagogue, but this Jesus who walked a mile in our shoes had his stepping out shoes. I'm not saying Jesus was a rebel, but you would be hard pressed to call him a goody two shoes. When Levi had a party at his house, a raucous party with all of his fellow sinners and tax-collectors, Jesus put on his going out shoes. Not everyone approved of that. He got criticized by the religious folks, the righteous folks. But isn't that what makes him fully human. He didn't just walk in some shoes, he walked in all of our shoes, including ones who were shunned and judged and snubbed.
- He must have had some everyday shoes, everyday shoes that symbolized his concern for everyone. Those everyday shoes

brought him in contact with the leper and the lame, the deaf and the blind, the sad and sorrowful, or to put it in a phrase that captures the depth of his kindness and compassion, he walked a mile in the shoes of the least, the last, and the lost.

- But don't forget Jesus had himself some awful nice wedding shoes. He was kind of kicking the dust in the corner when his mother told him the hosts of the wedding had run out of wine. He kept on kicking the dust but Mary was adamant. Finally Jesus kicked the party into high gear by turning water into wine, big, huge vessels of water into wine, and not just ordinary everyday wine, it was the best wine. There is no record of it, but who is to say he didn't give those wedding shoes a turn or two on the dance floor. One of the great promises of scripture is that God will turn our mourning into dancing.
- He had a good pair of hiking shoes as he always seemed to be going up one mountain or another.
- He had parade shoes, for that special day when he entered Jerusalem to the shouts of Hosanna and the cries of "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."
- He had his praying shoes for that night he went out in the Garden and prayed for God to remove the cup.
- He had his court shoes, his trial shoes, when he was falsely accused and unjustly sentenced to death.
- And the God who walked a mile in our shoes had his crucifixion shoes, the ones he wore as he carried his cross up the hill of Calvary, where he would endure rejection, humiliation, suffering, and death.
- From the little booties he wore when he was born in his manger to the bare feet that were pierced with nails at his crucifixion, Jesus walked a mile in our shoes.

This Jesus who walked a mile in our shoes 2,000 years ago is the same Jesus who has an amazing ability to walk among us even now, today, in our world, in our lives, in our footsteps. He comes to us often as the stranger and he comes to us as the neighbor; he comes to us as a

friend or a member of the family; he comes in ways we might expect and he comes from out of the blue, stepping into our world just when we had lost hope; he comes in ways we immediately recognize, and he comes in ways that we only realize much later after time has passed and our eyes have slowly opened. I can't explain it, and I can't claim to understand it. But I believe it. The one who walked a mile in our shoes as Jesus of Nazareth continues to walk among us today. He didn't abandon his name when he ascended to heaven. He is still Immanuel. He is still God with us.

So on this Christmas Day I am thinking of a story written by Leo Tolstoy about a shoemaker named Martin. Tolstoy was Russian and the story is set in Russia. This man named Martin was a cobbler. He had a little shop set below ground, so he could look out at the sidewalk as he worked. He would see people walking by in their various shoes, and he recognized many of the people simply from the shoes they wore, for he himself had made their shoes.

Martin the Cobbler was familiar with sadness. His wife had died. He had children but they had passed on, and for a long time he was bitter and angry with God. Through the wise counsel of a friend, he was encouraged to seek God rather than reject God, and so Martin began to read the Gospel stories. Much as we talked about this morning, he came to love the God who walked a mile in our shoes. He came to love Jesus, who endured all that we endured, and in fact walked a mile we could never walk when he made his way up Calvary to die on the cross. As Martin came to love Jesus, he wanted to know Jesus better. He worried that he might be like some in the gospels who turned their back on Jesus, who ignored Jesus, who rejected Jesus, or simply did not recognize Jesus when he came to them. He began to worry that if Jesus came to him, he would not welcome him. Finally, there came a night when Jesus appeared to Martin in a dream and told him to watch, for Jesus himself was coming to visit Martin the next day.

Martin woke early. He shook his head. He tried to clear his mind. Did Jesus really come to him in his dream or was his old and tired mind playing tricks on him. He wasn't sure. Nevertheless, he rushed to his shop and began to work, hoping beyond hope that his dream was true,

and that Jesus would come to visit him. And if Jesus did come, Martin would offer him a welcome that was warm and loving and filled with kindness.

It was a cold and snowy day as Martin sat by the window, looking out into the street more than he worked, and whenever anyone passed in unfamiliar boots he would stoop and look up, so as to see not the feet only but the face of the passerby as well. A house-porter passed in new felt boots; then a water-carrier. Presently an old soldier of Nicholas' reign came near the window, spade in hand. Martin knew him by his boots, which were shabby old felt ones, galoshed with leather. The old man was called Stepánitch: a neighboring tradesman kept him in his house for charity, and his duty was to help the house-porter. He began to clear away the snow before Martin's window. Martin glanced at him and then went on with his work. "I must be growing crazy with age," said Martin, laughing at his fancy. "Stepánitch comes to clear away the snow, and I imagine it is Christ coming to visit me. Old dotard that I am!" Yet after he had made a dozen stitches he felt drawn to look out of the window again. He saw that Stepánitch had leaned his spade against the wall and was either resting himself or trying to get warm. The man was old and broken down and had evidently not enough strength even to clear away the snow. "What if I called him in and gave him some tea?" thought Martin." So Martin invited Stepanitch in, let him warm himself by the fire, prepared him some tea, visited with him, and even shared what he now felt was his silly dream, that Christ himself would come to visit. Stepanitch laughed with him at such a silly dream. Then as he thanked Martin profusely for his hospitality Stepanitch made his way back out into the bitter cold.

Martin put away the tea things and sat down to his work, stitching the back seam of a boot. And as he stitched he kept looking out of the window, waiting for Christ, and thinking about him and his doings. And his head was full of Christ's sayings. Two soldiers went by: one in government boots, and the other in boots of his own; then the master of a neighboring house, in shining galoshes; then a baker carrying a basket. All these passed on. Then a woman came up in worsted stockings and

peasant-made shoes. She passed the window but stopped by the wall. Martin glanced up at her through the window, and saw that she was a stranger, poorly dressed, and with a baby in her arms. She stopped by the wall with her back to the wind, trying to wrap the baby up, though she had hardly anything to wrap it in. The woman had only summer clothes on, and even they were shabby and worn. Through the window Martin heard the baby crying, and the woman trying to soothe it, but unable to do so. Martin rose and going out of the door and up the steps he called to her. "My dear, I say, my dear!" The woman heard and turned round. "Why do you stand out there with the baby in the cold? Come inside. You can wrap him up better in a warm place. Come this way!"

Stirring in his kitchen Martin found some bread and cabbage soup and shared them with the woman the baby. Seeing how threadbare her cloak was he took an old jacket off the wall and gave it to her. With tears in her eyes the woman thanked Martin for his kindness. As she left, she said, "It is not by chance that I stopped outside your door. Surely Christ himself sent me to your window. Without your help my baby would have frozen, and we would both have starved. Bowing to him as she left, she thanked him once more.

After the woman had gone, Martin ate some of the cabbage soup, cleared the things away, and sat down to work again. He sat and worked, but did not forget the window, and every time a shadow fell on it he looked up at once to see who was passing. People he knew and strangers passed by, but no one remarkable. Late in the day Martin noticed a struggle between a woman selling apples from her cart and a young lad who stole one of the apples. He interceded and pleaded the cause of the young boy and asked the woman to show mercy and forgiveness. The boy tearfully apologized for stealing and the woman found it in her heart to forgive him. As they moved on the boy offered to help the woman carry her cart and she accepted his offer with a smile.

When they were out of sight Martin went back to the house. He picked up his awl and sat down again to work. He worked a little, but could soon not see to pass the bristle through the holes in the leather; and presently he noticed the lamplighter passing on his way to light the

street lamps. "Seems it's time to light up," thought he. So he trimmed his lamp, hung it up, and sat down again to work. He finished off one boot and, turning it about, examined it. It was all right. Then he gathered his tools together, swept up the cuttings, put away the bristles and the thread and the awls, and, taking down the lamp, placed it on the table. Many feet had passed his door. Different shoes and boots and galoshes. But never the Christ. His dream must have been a mistake.

With a bit of disappointment Martin sat down with his bible. How he wished Jesus had come to visit him as he dreamed he would. Nevertheless, he opened to the Gospels and began to read. As he read, he kept thinking of his dream. While he was reading, he thought he heard the footsteps of someone moving behind him. Martin turned round, and it seemed to him as if people were standing in the dark corner, but he could not make out who they were. And a voice whispered in his ear: "Martin, Martin, don't you know me?" "Who is it?" muttered Martin. "It is I," said the voice. And out of the dark corner stepped Stepánitch, who smiled and vanishing like a cloud was seen no more. "It is I," said the voice again. And out of the darkness stepped the woman with the baby in her arms and the woman smiled and the baby laughed, and they too vanished. "It is I," said the voice once more. And the old woman and the boy with the apple stepped out and both smiled, and then they too vanished. And Martin's soul grew glad. He crossed himself, put on his spectacles, and began reading the Gospel just where it had opened; and at the top of the page he read, "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you visited me." And at the bottom of the page, he read: "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren even these least, ye did it unto me." And Martin understood that his dream had come true; and that the Savior had really come to him that day, and he had welcomed him.

I do believe the God who walked a mile in our shoes continues to walk with us even today. We might never know where. We might never know when. But I hope and pray that we always know who. It is Jesus, Immanuel, our God who is with us. And I hope and pray that we always

know why. He walks with us because he loves us. Merry Christmas dear friends. Merry Christmas, and may our eyes be open and our hearts ready to welcome our Lord whenever he comes to us.