



## May 17 - Footprints

The day that my Dad died was a very difficult day. Jenie and I returned to Des Moines around dinnertime and met her parents and Allison at a local restaurant. We waited until the trip home from dinner to tell Allison that “Grandpa Bob” had died. As we were sharing this news, a pure white bird started to fly alongside the car and then perched on a sign while we were stopped at a red light.

This is not an isolated story. I have spoken with several people who have interpreted things as signs after a loved one transitions from this world to the next. These signs become reminders for us. They help us to know that our loved ones are okay and that God is walking with us. It is a beautiful thing.

In the Acts text for today, Jesus is saying “goodbye” to his disciples. They seem far more worried about the reestablishment of the kingdom of Israel. Some things seldom change. Jesus responds with a reminder that we are not to be bothered by such things. Instead, we are to be “Witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

That is a loaded statement. Judea and Samaria means that they need to find a way to reconcile with a feud that had been built over centuries. And when that is done, go out to the rest of the world. The mission begins with healing the wounds and dysfunction closest to home and then propels out to the rest of the world.

As Jesus finishes giving this command, he is taken up into the heavens. Poof. He is gone and the description of the disciples seems very accurate. They are standing around looking at the sky. I would be too. I would be trying to see where Jesus went and if he was headed back. There would be a pondering about my lack of understanding of modern physics.

In a lot of artwork around the Ascension of Our Lord, this is depicted with feet sticking out of the clouds. It makes sense that artists would depict it that way. One other similarity in the artwork is that they often show Jesus’ footprints on the ground next to the disciples. There is a tangible sign that Jesus was with them.

These footprints become the guide for the disciples as they go about the work of being witnesses to the ends of the earth. They are guided by the example that Jesus gave. They go out and witness to the good news of the love of God. How did they do? Sometimes, we look at the work of the disciples after Jesus’ Ascension and wonder how much they really did. Most stayed in Jerusalem. They did not go far from there. All of them were martyred but one.

Yet, they clearly rose to the challenge. The fact that we can gather here, in Central Iowa, and know the good news of God’s love made known through Christ Jesus, tells us that they were witnesses. We are close to the exact opposite side of the earth from Jerusalem. Mataura, in the French Polynesian Islands, is the exact opposite. And you know what? There are multiple Christian Churches there. The witness of Jesus HAS reached the ends of the earth.

It is easy to get discouraged within the North American Christian Church. It is easy to look at the declining membership and attendance and feel overcome with grief. The Church is not what it used to be. Much like the disciples staring at the sky, it is easy to stare in the distance hoping for a miracle. Instead, we are to look for the signs, the footprints, here around us.

When I watch the birds, my heart smiles knowing that God is near. For our ministry together, the footprints and signs look different. I look at the various ministries that are alive and well and they are footprints and signs for me. My heart smiles knowing that God is walking with us. What are the footprints for you? The truth is that the footprints of Jesus are here as we continue the work of Christ, as we witness God’s love to the world. I thank God for the many ways each of you shows the love of God to the world around. Amen.