

It's Ascension Day, the Day of Christ's rising—flying!—into heaven. And we have three pictures on our bulletin cover to celebrate (*see page 6*). But look closely: in all three, Jesus left footprints on the ground where he was standing. And in one of the pictures, his footprints even have holes like Jesus' feet, marked from the crucifixion.

On the day celebrating Christ's flight heaven-ward, we are looking at footprints. What do these footprints mean? In one sense, they recall all the places where Jesus' feet trod: As a toddler, to Egypt and back in his flight from Herod; as a youth, to and from the temple in Jerusalem where he loved to learn. Jesus' feet went all over Nazareth, where he was raised and rejected, and down by the seashore, where he called the first disciples.

The footprints remind us of Jesus' walks into the marketplaces, where people would bring the sick for his healing touch, and into the homes of Martha and Mary and Lazarus and Zaccheus, where Jesus ate meals and rested with friends.

The footprints help us remember Christ's triumphant march into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the walk in the garden where he prayed and was arrested, and the trail of tears trod to the cross.

Seeing those footprints below Christ's ascension, especially the ones bearing the scars, reminds us of the last steps Christ took on his way to death, and

hopefully, too, of those first steps in the garden or on the way to Galilee or Emaus when risen from the grave.

Yes, in the art of the Ascension, as the resurrected Christ flies up to heaven, the footprints remind us of Christ's earthly birth and ministry, death and resurrection, presence and time on earth before heaven.

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Now, mentioning Jesus and footprints together may bring into your mind that popular inspirational Christian poem. You know the one—sometimes it gets printed on a poster—where there are two sets of footprints on a beach, representing a person and Jesus, but then there is only one set. The quote then says something like, “During those times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, that was when I carried you.”

Is that to be a comforting image . . . having Jesus carry you on the beach? Whatever the case, Jesus walking on the beach is **not** what I think these artists with their tiny Jesus-footprints are getting at. Because the footprints at the base of the Ascension points us not towards Jesus' presence, but point toward Jesus' absence. These footprints aren't showing that Jesus is carrying us. They're showing that he's up and gone.

And the footprints that these faithful artists drew are asking us to consider how we are to live now that God-on-Earth, now that the Word-made-Flesh, is physically absent.

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May 13, 2018
Ascension of
Our Lord (Observed)

Acts 1:1-11
Psalm 47
Ephesians 1:15-23
Luke 24:44-53

For how will Christ make footprints now? How will Christ make an impression in the world, or leave a mark on people? After the Ascension, now that Jesus is physically *absent*, how will people know that Christ is with them, walking with them, traveling to them, living among them, just as he demonstrated while he was on earth?

Christ will do it with footprints; however, the prints will have to be from *our* feet. With our bodies.

For when he ascends, Jesus tells the disciples, “You are witnessed to these things.” “You,” Jesus says, “have seen everywhere I’ve trod, how all that was written about me has been fulfilled.” “You,” Jesus says, “have seen my footprints.” “[So] you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Christ essentially says to the disciples, “You’re going to have a lot of walking to do.” And they do it. The Book of Acts records their numerous journeys, mostly on foot, to the ends of the earth. Those first disciples leave tracks all over Judea and Samaria and beyond.

When Christ ascends into heaven, when Christ’s feet no longer touch the ground, their feet become the Lord’s feet.

And so it is for us. Like the disciples, *we* are witnesses to these things. And so we are charged to go, like the disciples, to the ends of earth on our feet, making Christ's footprints on the earth.

After the Ascension, now that Jesus is physically absent, how will people know that Christ is with them? Because we will walk to and be with them.

There is an old Anglican Church tradition in England that takes literally and seriously Christ's command to witness and walk to the ends of the earth. Or, at least, around your town.

It's a ritual called "Beating the Bounds," performed every Ascension Day. "Beating" refers in part to the fact that the ritual involves walking, beating your feet against the pavement and ground. And "bounds" refers to the boundary lines of a parish, the geographical area in which everyone went to the same church.

On Ascension Day, the priest and congregation and children would walk the entire perimeter of the parish. They would walk the area where everyone in their congregation lived, the ends of their earth, witnessing and visiting and marking with their feet the territory where they were specifically called to go and proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Now, we are not an Anglican parish from England five-hundred years ago. But Christ's Ascension today still bids us to beat the bounds, to witness with our feet. For as Saint Teresa of Avila famously wrote, "Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. . . . Yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about, doing good." *

*(*there are a few translations/iterations of this)*

If Christ is going to leave any more physical footprints on the earth in these days after the Ascension, they will be with our feet.

If repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in Christ's name to all nations, it will be proclaimed from our mouths.

If Christ's death and resurrection is to be witnessed to the ends of the earth, then it will happen as we walk through life.

After the Ascension, now that Jesus is physically absent, how will people know that Christ is with them? By our walking out the church doors and witnessing with our feet on the ground, our bodies on the earth, not standing looking up toward heaven, but looking outward and around as we go.

AMEN.



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