

4th Sunday After the Epiphany

March 20, 2022

Year C RCL

Exodus 3: 1-15

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

Jesus Knows

A long, long, long time ago, I read a poem that many of you know called *Footprints or Footprints in the Sand* (I could not find an author everyone agreed upon). It goes like this:

“One night I had a dream...

I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord, and

Across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the Sand; One belonged to me, and the other to the Lord. When the

last scene of my life flashed before us, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that many times along the path of my life, There was only one set of footprints.

I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in my life

This really bothered me, and I questioned the Lord about it.

“Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,

You would walk with me all the way;

But I have noticed that during the

most troublesome times in my life,
There is only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why in times when I
needed you the most, you should leave me.
The Lord replied, "My precious, precious
child. I love you, and I would never,
never leave you during your times of
trial and suffering.
When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you."

The first time I saw this poem, it was printed on a picture of footprints in the sand. I thought it was beautiful, and I remember feeling heartened by the thought that God was with me during the worst times of my life. Over time, I forgot about this poem and the message of deep spiritual love it conveys. Life sometimes seems to overwhelm and overtake my awareness of God's presence, and I forget that God is near.

On days one awakens with a sense of dread or feels like they can hear the whole world sobbing, it can be hard to remember that God cares for us. It can be hard to remember that God is with us when we read news stories of famine, destruction, war, and inhuman acts by sociopathic leaders. It can be

hard to remember that God tenderly carries us when we suddenly lose our home, cherished family member, friend, or job. Sometimes, like during a fire, pandemic, or war, we can lose all these things simultaneously. It can be hard to remember that the God of love is holding our hands when that happens. Sometimes if we are filled with fear and anguish, we can become angry at God and push God away. We refuse to be comforted. Our faith begins to show signs of wear and tear.

On occasion, I have had conversations with atheists who believe that the suffering and pain they see or experience leads them to conclude that there is no God. They reject the notion that a loving, caring deity could have ever been present, especially during times of tragedy.

We all may want God to make “it better,” fix “it,” and restore our faith in each other and humanity. We want God to right wrongs, battle evil, and bring justice and mercy into our lives. We yearn for relief from our woes.

When God calls to Moses and tells him to come near, God’s words, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob,” let Moses know that God has been walking with his people for a very long time. God says, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a

land flowing with milk and honey.” You can almost feel a sigh of relief coming from Moses. Yes! God gets it, and God will make it all better. Until, of course, God gets to the part of the plan that Moses is destined to fulfill. We might not blame Moses for feeling a little panicky until God assures Moses that he will not be doing his work alone.

This Old Testament story portrays a God aware of all that is happening, all the time. When the time is right, God acts through individuals God has chosen because God knows that person has the skills and abilities needed for the assignment. Honestly, we might be hesitant, scared, and uncertain, and God knows that. However, faith that God is leading the team is reassuring. Yet it does not mean that there will not be hard times ahead. The promise is not smooth sailing through life. Instead, it is the knowledge that the tests of faith can be endured.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, “No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.” And so, the last stanza of the Footprints poem resonates with Paul when it says, “My precious, precious child. I love you, and I would never, never leave you during your times of trial and suffering. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.”

It is one thing to know that God never leaves us, is always with us, and cares for us. Intellectually I understand what this means. However, my heart is genuinely consoled when I think about being cared for by a God who knows how hard it can be to be human. Let me explain.

Last week, while I was outside planning to give communion in the courtyard, someone stopped me and asked what incarnation meant. At the time, I shared what I thought was a decent definition and offered to meet the person during coffee hour to talk more about it. We met, and during that discussion, I realized that the explanation I offered was close yet not quite right. So I decided to look up what the Episcopal Church said it meant. I found, in part, “Incarnatus: Latin term translated into English as **Incarnation**. It refers to the Christological assertion that Jesus was fully human and fully divine, the Son of God or Word in the flesh.”

Jesus, fully human and fully divine, means to me that the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the generations to follow, is not only with me during times of trial, but my Lord also knows what it feels like to be human. From the time he was a child, Jesus and his family were besieged by a tyrant bent on his destruction. The Jesus who carries me experienced mistreatment, pain, suffering, and anguish at the hands of oppressors. The Jesus who carries me was beaten, scourged, and mocked. The Jesus who

carries me had challenges for which he, too, sought prayer and guidance. Jesus, human and divine, knows what we are going through, and his love, empathy, and compassion are enduring.

That is the God who holds me in his arms. That is the God who carries you. That is the God who carries all of us.

I want to leave you with this thought. We are blessed when we allow ourselves to be carried by Jesus when we let go and place ourselves in the care of this loving gardener. Like the barren fig tree, when we let Him nurture and feed us, we can recover ourselves and bear spiritual fruit again.