

Sermon for Sunday, February 22, 2015
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
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“How do you turn a corner
when you are walking?”

It’s one of the first questions you ask
when you are teaching a child to ski,
once they’ve mastered
actually clicking the skis on,
and sliding down an incline so gentle
that without the smooth sheen of snow,
you might struggle to see any slope to it at all.
Then next step, of course, is to learn to turn,
to control the skis
so you can actually go where you want.
And that’s when the question comes in.

“How do you turn a corner
when you are walking?”

Most times when you ask,
they look at you as if you are crazy.

“You turn your feet.”

“So how do you turn a corner when you’re skiing?”

“You turn your feet.”

It sounds so simple,
but once you add snow and skis to the equation
most kids seem to think
that twisting your arms
and contorting your body
will have the desired effect.

It doesn’t.

And so you have to remind them
that they need to turn their feet.

You may be wondering
what this has to do with our psalm today
- or any of our readings, of that matter -
or if this brutally cold weather and snow and ice
has frozen my brain.

But our psalm today
 keeps talking
 about where our feet go.
 Not in
 so many words,
 but look at verses three and four, and eight and nine:
 Show me your ways, O LORD,
 and teach me your paths.
 Lead me in your truth and teach me.
 [The Lord] guides the humble in doing right
 and teaches his way to the lowly.
 All the paths of the LORD are love and faithfulness...

All throughout the first nine verses of this psalm, the verses appointed to be read today
 is this image of a path, a road, a way
 where God leads us
 and we are to follow.

It's something we've heard before.
 Remember Psalm 119?
 Your word is a lamp to my feet
 and a light to my path. (v.105)

And Psalm 23?
 He leads me in right paths
 for his name's sake. (v.3)

And Psalm 16?
 You show me the path of life.
 In your presence there is fullness of joy;
 in your right hand are pleasures for evermore. (v.11)

Time after time
 in the psalms,
 we are invited to follow God
 on a path to life.
 We go
 where our feet go,
 and our feet go
 in the steps of God.

And perhaps it's no surprise
 that the announcement
 made by John the Baptist,
 drawing on the words of the prophet Isaiah,
 was to prepare the way of the Lord,
 to make straight his paths,
 to make a pathway for the Messiah,
 Jesus Christ,
 who would in turn call us
 to follow him.

And following Jesus Christ, when he called his first followers
 wasn't just a figure of speech.

If you've been reading our daily Lenten meditations,
 you'll remember the story of Jesus calling his first disciples,
 just after his time in the wilderness
 that we heard about today in the gospel.

Mark tells it this way:

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Following Jesus
 meant literally picking up your belongings
 and going on the road with him
 as he walked the roads and paths of the Holy Land,
 teaching and preaching and healing
 wherever he went.

It meant
 letting your feet
 follow his feet,
 one dusty step after another.

Of course,
 once Jesus died and rose again,
 the disciples couldn't follow him in exactly that way

any more.
They had to re-learn
what it meant to follow Jesus.

And what they discovered
is that it meant
making every decision in their life
with reference
to what Jesus had done,
in every situation thinking “what would Jesus do.”

And yes, sometimes even turning their feet
in a different direction.
For Ananias,
it meant turning his feet towards a house in the street called Straight,
where the persecutor Saul
could be found,
Saul
who walking along the road to Damascus,
saw a vision of Jesus
and was blinded.
And Ananias
met Saul,
and healed his eyes
and baptized him,
and Saul became
the great apostle
Paul
whose feet took him across the Mediterranean
preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And there have been countless others
over the centuries
holy women and holy men
who have heard the call of Jesus to follow him
and have followed him with their feet
traveling throughout the world
to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But for most of us

following Jesus Christ
is less dramatic.

We may have used our feet, literally,
to get us here to church this morning,
but following the path of Jesus,
the path of God
is not just about getting ourselves to church,
but about the way we live our everyday life more broadly.
And that takes us back to our psalm.

Because what the psalm is all about
is following God,
and according to verse nine,
following God
is about love and faithfulness
and keeping God's commands.

“All the paths of the LORD are love and faithfulness,” says the psalmist.
“to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.”

It sounds lovely - but how do we do it?
This is where verse four comes in.
Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
in you have I trusted all the day long.

In order to know
how to follow in God's way
we need to be willing
to be taught by God.
And to be taught by God
we need to be open
to learning.

And how do we learn from God?
The most obvious way
is to learn from God's word,
Scripture,
the bible.

There is nothing
that will give us more knowledge of how to live,
more insight into God
than hearing and reading
Scripture.

What Scripture does
is mark a path for us to go,
a path that will lead us
when life is good
and when life is not so good.

Because one of the things you learn when you are skiing,
is that if you practice turning your feet
often enough,
eventually it becomes natural, even automatic.
And then, when an unexpected bump appears,
or the slope is suddenly steeper,
you find your feet turning for you, just when you need them.

And the same thing is true as we follow Jesus.
If we are in the habit of turning our feet
to follow in his way,
we will find
that our feet will begin to turn of their own accord.
When, as the psalm reminds us,
we are threatened or struggling,
our feet will know what to do.
They will lead us
in God's way,
along the path
towards Jesus Christ.

If we have listened to our teacher,
if we have listened to God
our feet will turn
when they need to.

Show me your ways, O LORD,
and teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
in you have I trusted all the day long.