

March 28, 2010, Confirmation Sunday
Exodus 3:1-5; Hebrews 12:1-3
First Parish UCC, Brunswick
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On the Way

Put your shoes on. How many times have we heard this or said this? Put your shoes on. We've got to go.

So which shoes will we put on? Soft moccasins or fuzzy slippers? Boots – steel toed boots, snow boots, ski boots, mud boots, or high waders? Sport shoes – soccer cleats, hockey skates, sneakers? Or something easy – clogs, sandals, or flip-flops?

Maybe there was some tension in your household this morning about what is the appropriate footwear for church. Did you pull out your platform heels, or nice flats, or those tie leather shoes that you only wear for church or graduation? Such celebratory kind of footwear is appropriate for a day like today. However, maybe you discovered at the last minute that those dress shoes no longer fit. Well, any shoes you ended up wearing today are appropriate, for each kind of footwear has a place on the way of faith.

In fact, the letter to the Hebrews suggests we should put on our running shoes for the faith journey, *Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race...* so if you wore sneakers today you're right on. Such footwear allows us to be on the move, on the way, to be God's people at work in the world.

Indeed we began our confirmation year together with running shoes, or at least good walking shoes, when the youth and parents walked together through parts of Brunswick and Topsham. We remembered some of our congregation's history going by the Harriet Beecher Stowe House, the present day Theater Project which used to be the church vestry, and then stopping at the banks of the Androscoggin river where the first worship service to which we trace our roots happened.

We were mindful of earth care and the environmental challenges of this area as we walked along the Topsham side of the river and recalled the work of Senator Muskie to enact the Clean Water Act, specifically in response to the pollution of the Androscoggin.

We talked about economic challenges and economic justice, past and present, as we walked across the swinging bridge remembering all the mill workers who used to daily cross that bridge, and as we passed the Tedford Homeless Shelter and Midcoast Hunger Prevention, both outreach ministries our congregation supports.

Along the way we also acknowledged other faith traditions, stopping outside the Shambala Buddhist Center and going into St. John's Catholic Church so that we might learn more about people of other faiths and other traditions within Christianity.

Over the year the confirmands have had on their running shoes as they have contributed their time and energy to the work of the church here at First Parish and in the wider community. In the bulletin is a list of all the different groups and places where they gave service.

Confirmands, we have been on a journey together this year in confirmation. It has been a privilege for us – church staff, mentors, parents, and congregation – to join you in this journey. Today we have gathered to affirm your baptisms and to celebrate you gifts and your ministries. We are grateful for your presence in our midst and we trust that as we continue on the Way, together we will learn more about what it means to love God and love neighbor.

On the way of faith, each person finds their own words to give expression to their experiences of the Holy and their sense of calling. I asked the confirmands to complete these three sentences....

God is...

I walk in the Way of Jesus by...

The Church is important to me because...

Here are some of their thoughts.

God is..

In all of us

In everything

Creator of all things

A friend that listens

Love

Forgiver

A spiritual force

A guide throughout struggles in life

Big hand that holds the faith world without letting it slip

I walk in the Way of Jesus by...

Caring for others

Respectful to God and others

Forgiveness

Prayer

Loving myself/who I am

Trying to follow the 10 commandments

Thanking God for all the wonderful things in my life

Not stealing or telling lies, being honest

Living the way he would want me to

Treating people the way you want to be treated

The church is important to me because...

We learn more about faith

Connects us with our past

Encourages me to care for others going through difficult times

Feel welcome, like Jesus is inviting me to sit and listen with him

I am able to make friends with people I might not have met

As a member, I will be able to vote

Helps me settle things down

It's proof of God when people get together to do things for others

Peaceful place

See people (young & old)

Can share what you think about your faith with others.

Gives us hope

* * *

It is important to put our shoes on so that we might run with perseverance the race of faith, that we might continue to follow in the Way of Jesus. But there are also times when our feet are called to something other than shoes and running. There are times when we need to recognize the craziness of this 24/7 world we live in. There are times when we need to stop running, and talking, tweeting, and texting, and *Take off those shoes and know that you are standing on holy ground*, as God said to Moses.

We need time, God's time, to let our toes dig deep into the soil and remember that we are earth creatures and God saw that it was very good. We need time to let our bodies be nourished in direct interaction with the earth from which we were formed. We need time to our minds be delighted by its sensory responses to the natural world. We need time to let our souls be soothed by the breath of the Spirit in the wind. We need time, as one of the confirmands said, to sit with Jesus.

In other words, we need time to take off our shoes, turn off our cell phones, ipods, blackberries, and computers and be still and know.

So, on the way, wear those dress-up shoes for celebrations, wear those sports shoes for good exercise, and wear those running shoes for the work of service. But be sure to take time to take off all those shoes and know that you are standing on holy ground. Take time to be still and know that God is.