

**I)** Long before school systems changed their academic calendars, the “traditional” start of the school year was Tuesday after Labor Day. To me it always meant one thing in particular . . . It was the last weekend I could run around without shoes on! Every Labor Day, I knew that the next morning, along with every other routine of getting ready for school -I would have to put shoes and socks on my feet.

I loved being barefoot as a young person. It was long before I knew what a tick was – so there was no creepy danger of finding one of those little guys attached to my feet. And it was a time when little scared me about running around without shoes and socks. My overly cautious mother would warn me almost every day to watch where I stepped. Her everyday warning included the scary imagery of stepping on a board with a nail sticking out. If that happened, I might suffer from possible tetanus. At that young age, I had no idea what that was, but knew it was something that gave my mother great concern. I assured her, that if we ran into the woods or an abandoned dump pile – I would make sure I was wearing my shoes! Realistically, most of my barefoot time was spent running throughout the neighborhood yards.

Every once in a while, we’d venture out onto the streets. Always, we’d YELP, and run for the grass. Tar and gravel streets in the summer heat are not good walking paths! However, that was the unique reality of going barefoot all summer. Not on the streets, but along someone’s gravel drive – we could traverse those stones with almost no cries of discomfort. That was the beauty of having the bottoms of your feet so toughened that little things like stones would not be a discomfort.

All of that would change as I aged, I spent more time in the classroom, and I spent less time walking barefoot. I would look forward to the summer, and being places where I could take off my shoes and walk without foot covering.

At some point in my adult learning, I came across the concept called: **Earthing**. Earthing is based on the practice of receiving the natural energy produced by electrons, from the earth. This energy is replenished and stimulated by the sun, lightning, and the deep molten core of our planet. Energy vibrates at different frequencies which gives our landmasses and oceans a very subtle negative charge. Some people feel this charge as a pleasant tingling or warmth in their feet when walking outside.

- Our ancestors were connected. They slept on animal hides. They walked barefoot, or with pieces of thin leather to cover their soles, allowing transference of the Earth's energy into the body.
- The Chinese hold belief around a Heaven Qi, consisting of forces that heavenly bodies exert on Earth . . . like sunshine, moonlight, and the moon's effects on the tides. Earth Qi, influenced and controlled by Heaven Qi, is made up of lines and patterns of energy, working with the Earth's magnetic field and the heat beneath the ground.

The natural cycles of Heaven Qi and Earth Qi influence the growth of humans, animals, and plants. We absorb the Earth Qi when we walk barefoot.

- Adolf Just, an early founder of naturopathy believed our feet were to us, what roots were to plant systems: A source of energy and strength drawn from the Earth through our feet.
- **Luther Standing Bear** of the Lakota Sioux tradition wrote: "The old people came literally to love the soil. They sat on the ground with the feeling of being close to a mothering power. It was good for the skin to touch the Earth, and the old people liked to remove their moccasins and walk with their bare feet on the sacred Earth. The soil was soothing, strengthening, cleansing, and healing."

Long before I ever heard of GROUNDING, and could possibly understand and comprehend this thinking, I felt it! I never called it healing. Yet, for myriad reasons, I knew it was right and good to plant my bare feet on the soil, take in every step, and feel every sensation. It was that way whether I was in my yard, running through the neighborhood, in a local town playground, or at a community swimming park: I stood on holy ground!

That's why, when I first read today's scripture text, I could not get beyond verse 5: ". . . `Come no closer! Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.'"

**II)** I imagine that when Moses heard the voice of God, Moses felt that tingle . . . that vibration of energy emanating from the Earth's core. Feet planted firmly. Transfixed, fully connected with Heaven and Earth. Stirred, not scared. Startled, but curious.

Moses' origin story, as you remember, is one of contrast: He was born of Hebrew parents and raised amidst Egyptian royalty. His personal awakening opened him to the cruelty of his own. Protection of the oppressed led him to flee for his own protection. **This morning's text finds him married and sheep-herding his father-in-law's flocks.**

In the flames of this bush not consumed, Moses is summoned near to hear God's voice and receive everything he never wanted to hear. Words that would certainly derail a life he thought was on track!

Take off your sandals. Feel the pulsing of my creation. It is good that you are here. It is good that I am here with you.

Taking off his sandals was more than submitting to this presence. Standing with bare feet, holding curiosity, and awed by the unknown; Moses stands not just on holy ground, but he stands here invited into the covenant of his ancestors.

I am a big fan of the PBS series: FINDING YOUR ROOTS. If you are unfamiliar with this show; it is about a **Harvard professor who researches " the DNA of American culture."** Each episode introduces a celebrity, and that person's ancestral history. Sometimes they learn of connections to famous or infamous people, discover secrets, and share that experience with viewers.

This, I imagine, was Moses' moment of FINDING HIS ROOTS!

Like some of the celebrities on this series, the revelations of ancestral history can be overwhelming – And for Moses, learning of his ancestral connections caused him to turn his gaze from God.

As if he could "hide" from God!

Before this bush had ever begun to flame, God was already working to bring salvation to the Hebrew people. The last three verses of Exodus, Chapter 2 tell us:

**23** The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God.

**24** God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

**25** God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

God had made up God's mind: Salvation would come. These people would be brought out of enslavement to a land flowing with more than food and drink. A place that they could call their own and form their new identity.

You, Moses, are the one I have chosen – says God.

At this point, Moses' foundation [just] might be starting to weaken. Anxiety. Questioning. Fear? The ground no longer feeling firm. The sands of the desert, hot, all of a sudden. Must leave. Forget this.

Moses . . . I will be with you and watch your return.

Moses won't go on faith alone. Moses needs something to prove that God is with him and these people.

I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE . . . That's all you need to tell them. The one who covenanted to be with -Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob.

I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE . . . for your ancestors, and all generations to come.

**III)** This story is a quintessential call story. A story that many, me included, have alluded to in the past when telling our own story of how we felt called to serve in various dimensions of ministry.

However, let us all see this more than a call story for people who feel (or felt) called to ministry. I'd like to offer that we all might find ways to embrace this story and make it our own.

Opening up to examine your heart, there's a chance you might find times when God has called out to you. Some of those times, just a whisper of God's voice sends you running towards that invitation. Eager

and anxious. Hoping that you were not imaging this. Ready to receive whatever God wishes to give. Like the blank pages of a journal; write upon my heart what it is you need me to be, to do, to say, to live.

However . . . There are sometimes when that voice of God speaks out, and you are anything but ready and willing to receive God's message. Whoa! Not me! Not today. Maybe never? There are so many others who can . . . Actually, let me give you a name or two of folks who can do this. Please not now. It's not the right time. I want to, but I just cannot figure out how to make this fit into what's going on in my life.

I'll wager to say that these responses come from a heart not grounded. A life's stride that feels more like a race than a walk.

Only a miracle could give you time to really listen to this message, and hear what it is saying.

What modern equivalent of a bush aflame, burning but not consuming the plant, do you need?!

**STOP!** (Is that the voice of God?!) Take off your shoes. Plant your feet into the beauty and the power of my creation. Feel my energy. Feel my love.

I tried it! It still works. I went out onto the lawn of Pilgrim House, along Cleaveland St., Thursday night, after dark. Without shoes or socks. Ground a little cold in places. Still a little wet from Wednesday's storm. Soft – no stones, a couple twigs. I just walked. I stopped a couple times, and would plant my feet firmly, close my eyes, and just be present to what I felt.

The last walk was in the grass, in front of the newest garden. I'd stopped – facing the church, near the Peace Pole. When I opened my eyes after that last pause – there it was. I needed no words. No cajoling to follow or lead. I needed nothing. Above my head was all I needed: A full moon so close to the earth. I didn't need words. I knew - I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE . . . for all generations to come.

These next words are not mine. They are those of **Rev. Dr. Mary Luti**, a retired seminary professor and UCC pastor . . . and friend of our Senior Pastor:

**"Somewhere out there, or deep within, the bush still burns, the voice still calls. Perhaps to you."**

Trust me.

Take off your shoes.