

“Walking in His Shoes”

Rev. Christy E. Dew
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Text: Romans 14:1-12

First Christian Church
115 Courthouse Plaza
Manhattan KS 66502

The scripture that I will be using for today, comes from Romans 14:1-12. Again, I have “The Message” with me because I don’t know about you, but Paul is a little difficult to understand. He seems to speak in a circular way and so I have it in an interesting format that will help us hear it a little differently. But first I want to talk with you about music.

How many of you have your favorite genre of music? This is participatory (hands raising in the congregation) *good!* I’m going to name a few and if it’s your favorite, raise your hand. How many of you like hip hop? (hands raised) ok. How many of you like classical? (hands raised) How many of you like country/western? (hands raised) How many of you like instrumental jazz? (hands raised) How many of you like Latin music? (hands raised) Salsa? There we go, some hands raising. How many of you like big band? (hands raised) How many of you like jazz like Ella Fitz Gerald and Billy Holiday? (hands raised) How many of you like techno? (hands raised) ok. How many of you like steel drum? (hands raised) We’re getting there. These are questions that used to be phrased “*What’s in your glove compartment?*” Right. What eight tracks are you carrying around? What’s on your mix tape? What’s on your iTunes? What’s on your iPod, right? Now there’s a new thing. What’s on your Pandora? Do any of you know about this? This is the most amazing thing that I think that I have ever seen to date, other than God. But it’s probably the coolest thing and it’s not a plug by any stretch of the imagination. But if you go online and you put in your favorite artists, maybe you have 5 of them. They can be eclectic, from all different kinds of music. It makes your own radio station without commercials. (People shaking their heads.) Yes...and your jaw drops. It makes your own radio station without commercials and it’s really, really accurate. There’s a science behind this. They plugged all these different things in. There are forty different definitions and what and who it appeals to and they decided if you like Billie Holiday and Hank Williams, that anybody that could play music or sound like that, they will download for you and you can listen all day without commercial interruption. It’s amazing. But you see, I don’t have that in the car. I get to have it at work, but I don’t have it in the car. So, I’m like a lot of you, I still do this (motioning to change the channel on the radio) when there’s a song I don’t like. How many of you hit the seek button or turn the radio station? Well there’s something about only listening to what you like. You never hear anything new or different right? So in the car is one of the few places when I hit those things that make my head hurt and I fast forward past them. Sometimes we land on a station and we play a game called “How much can we annoy the other person in the car?” (Laughter in the congregation) My favorite is to find the really old country/western station and it twangs. I grew up listening to that with my father. But there was something that happened the other day...

There is something about country music that rings true in what they say. They can say the absolute, positive, dead on things the hokiest way I have ever heard sometimes. Now please know that I love it, but I was listening to this song, shaking my head, going “*I cannot believe there is a song written like this.*” Now, I am going to read you the words, but I have to edit some of it. (Laughter in the congregation)

*Drivin’ through town just my boy and me, with a Happy Meal in his booster seat, knowin’ that he couldn’t have the toy ‘til his nuggets were gone. A green traffic light turned straight to red I hit my brakes and mumbled under my breath. His fries went a flyin’, and his orange drink covered his lap **Edited (and then he let loose with a word)** So I said, “Son, now where’d you learn to talk like that?” He said, “I’ve been watching you, dad ain’t that cool? I’m your buckaroo, I wanna be like you. And eat all my food and grow as tall as you are. We got cowboy boots and pants. Yeah, we’re just alike, hey, ain’t we dad? I want to do everything just like you. So I’ve been watching you.”*

Now you can just imagine the twangy sound and it was bad. (laughter in the congregation) and I was laughing. And then the next part, and this is what I really like about country music, it can make you laugh one minute and then cry the next. The dad says...

We got back home and I went to the barn I bowed my head and I prayed real hard and I Said, “Lord, please help me help my stupid self.” Just this side of bedtime later that night Turnin’ on my son’s nightlight. He crawled out of bed and he got down on his knees. He closed his little eyes, folded his little hands Spoke to God like he was talkin’ to a friend. And I said, “Son, now where’d you learn to pray like that?” He said, “I’ve been watching you, dad ..”¹

One moment, turned on a dime. So, music tells us a lot in a story. There’s a lot of stories behind, not only the toys² that we like or the music that we listen to, but we do it for a reason. We listen to these stories because we know what is going on. It connects to some really deep part of us, whether someone else likes it or not. We do it for a reason. So I ask you a question again. Not what your favorite music is, but why do you listen to it? What story does it tell about you? Why do you like it? Who is your favorite artist? Is it the music in the background or is it the

story that their lives tell. Now interestingly enough, we also have heroes and role models. I am going to ask you more questions.

How many of you, if you could take one moment, have a hero or role model that you could think of in an instant? how many of you have several rolling around in your mind? ok. What I want you to do, you all have a bulletin, or you're sharing with someone and there's a pencil in the pew. This is more than participatory today, this is work. I want you to write this down and I'm going to give you about thirty seconds. I want you to write down 3 things or characteristics that you admire or try to imitate from someone that is your hero. What about them makes you attracted to what they do? Are they strong? Are they courageous? Are they silent when there's conflict? Do they refused to speak an unkind word to anyone? Are they peaceful? Are they always loving? Do they do something that you've just always wanted to do and that's why you like them? You see children watch us. They like to play dress up. They like to try on other people's shoes. Victoria, you're smiling. Did you walk around in your dad or your mom's shoes? Your dad's? how many of you can remember raiding your brother or sister's closet, your mom or your dad's closet and trying something on? People are smiling and shaking their heads. Now what's interesting is that I loved my dad's shoes...but not the ones that he had been wearing. Cause my dad was an electrician and there were times when he had to be out in water and in mud and all those things and they smelled. Some of us have shoes that smell because we wear them all the time. We work in them. We do things in them, right. There are all kinds of things on the bottoms or maybe even the insides. But I liked trying on the shoes. I wanted to know what it was like. I wanted to know that one day my feet might be big enough to fit in them. Or that I could put on those high heels of my mom's and I would look just as tall and beautiful as she was, although she never thought she looked that great in them. But as children, when they do that... how many of you have seen them teeter on them. They can't walk very far. They can't move very fast. Children know that they're not meant to be in those shoes for very long right? They know that's it's only for a time of dreaming and maybe playing. But they know when its getting' down to serious business to run and to play, they gotta get 'em off because they can't move very quick.

Well it's interesting...when we talk about faith. Some of us have come to the place of faith...weak...or maybe just young in it. But we don't have this visual cue to remind us that it's ok to try something on for a while, but it's not meant for us. That's what Paul talking about in Romans today. See, new people of the faith have come in, people who have been there a long time, people who have been studying to be Jesus' disciples have these really big shoes to fill. And rather than giving them something manageable to put on, what would work for them....they've handed these new converts size 14 DD's and said, "Do you job in them." Now, it's clumsy when we're walking in somebody else's shoes, isn't it? Go back to with me to Romans. I'm going to read it to you this way.³

Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see thing the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with...Don't blame them when they fall down in your shoes...even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently. For instance a person who has been around for a while might well be convinced that he can eat anything on the table, while another, with a different background, might assume that they should only be a vegetarian and eat accordingly. But since both are guest at Christ's table, wouldn't it be terribly rude if they fell to criticizing what the other ate or didn't eat? God, after all, invited them both to the table. Do you have any business crossing people off the guest list or interfering with God's welcome? If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help. Or, say, one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of Conscience. What's important in all this is that if you keep a holy day, keep it for God's sake; if you eat meat, eat it to the glory of God and thank God for prime rib; if you're a vegetarian, eat vegetables to the glory of God and thank God for broccoli. None of us are permitted to insist on our own way in these matters. It's to God we are answerable to—all the way from life to death and everything in between—not each other. That's why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: so that he could be our Maters across the entire range of life and death, and free us from the petty tyrannies of each other. So where does that leave you when you criticize a brother? and where does that leave you when you condescend to a sister? I'd say it leaves you looking pretty silly, or worse. Eventually, we're all going to end up kneeling side by side in the place of judgment, facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren't going to improve your positing there one bit. Read it for yourself in Scripture: "As I live and breath," God says, "every knee will bow before me: Every tongue will tell the honest truth that I and only I am God."

See some of us have been trying to give other people our shoes to walk around in. Now, I don't know about you, but I have size 13's. I don't think that James⁴ in his size 2-4 shoes would do very well in these (pointing to the shoes on her feet). And I certainly wouldn't do very well in someone's size six. It might fit part of my toes, right? When we use that image, we see how ridiculous it is, we see how silly it is to put on someone else's shoes and walk

in them. But in church, we try to say, *“This is the mission. This is what God has for you.”* As Disciples, we are to study what God has for each of us. But I will say this, some of us have been walking around barefoot and not trying on any shoes at all. Now, I like the rest of you, like to be free of my shoes. They get hot and my feet get tired and sweaty. Some of our shoes wear out. The things that we have been doing with faith, also wear out. You may have been participating in practices that gave you so much joy and fulfillment, and now you’re finding them a bit empty. The image works; when our shoes wear out, we take them off and try something else, right? But sometimes with our faith, we get really stubborn. We don’t want to do anything different. We don’t want to try anything different. We don’t want to have anything different...**and we stop listening to God.**

And frankly, when you don’t take off shoes that don’t work, your feet start hurting and your whole body gets out of whack. If you stop listening to God and you stop walking where God has us walk, your spirit is going to start hurting and your body is going to start hurting. And the body that we have is a part of Christ’s body, right? Paul’s been telling us this the whole time, and so if we’re neglecting our part of this body, what justice are we doing to the call of Christ?

God has a purpose for each and every one of us. Maybe it’s time for us to go to the faith store. Not to the shoe store, but to the faith store. We need to take an inventory of what size our faith is and we need to put on something that is appropriate to that. We also need to know that our faith is supposed to grow. My prayer is that my feet don’t get any bigger than this, I’m already having trouble finding shoes. While our feet are supposed to stay relatively the same size, **our faith must grow!** Our faith is supposed to move. Our faith is supposed to be more than it is.... God loves you just the way you are, but that doesn’t mean that God doesn’t want you to be better. God wants something out of each of us.

So folks, it’s time to do a little inventory. Go into your faith life and see what doesn’t fit anymore. See what’s worn out. See what’s of no purpose. Maybe see if someone else can use it and pass it along. Be a good steward of that faith. But go and find what you need right now, that will stand you up straight, and maybe you can walk in God’s shoes for a little while.

Will you pray with me?

O God we know that you have given us a path to walk
and sometimes we’ve done it in someone else’s shoes.
But God, we’re looking for our own,
we’re looking for our own shoes to walk in.

O God, help us. Help us to know that the first step
is to come to you; to seek your expertise
to fit us with a new spirit, to encourage us
and tell us that it will be ok.

It may take us a little while to break it in,
but it’s going to be the best thing for us.

And O God, walk with us.

Walk right beside us and show us the way. **Amen**

- 1 Artist/Band: Atkins Rodney, Lyrics for Song: Watching You
- 2 The children’s sermon for the next several weeks are focused on prayers for children and today we talked about favorite toys from childhood.
- 3 From the Message Bible
- 4 James is a child in our congregation about 20 months old.