

**On your feet**

*Ezekiel 2:1-5; Mark 6:1-13*

Put your best foot forward. Stand on your own two feet. Stepping out. Getting off on the wrong foot. Having two left feet. Put one foot in front of the other. One step forward, two steps back. Getting cold feet. Stepping up to the mark. Putting your foot down. Walking a mile in someone else's shoes. Having itchy feet. Having feet of clay. Having your feet on the ground. Jumping in with both feet. Getting back on your feet. Sweeping someone off their feet. Voting with your feet. Shaking the dust off your feet. Stand up and be counted. And if you're over a certain age, maybe you will remember Nancy Sinatra's song, 'These boots are made for walking'.

It is surprising to think of how many idioms about feet, or walking we have in the English language. Idioms about feet are not simply saying something about physical reality, but speak of purpose, and attitude and a frame of mind. Feet are made for standing, and walking, and moving.

The reading from the prophet Ezekiel tells us about the commissioning of a young man, Ezekiel, as a prophet of God. It comes as a bit of a surprise. The first chapter is all about visions of a stormy wind, a flashing fire, four-faced beasts seated on a chariots that could travel in every direction, and a throne where a human-formed figure sat in glory, Whose bright image was like that of a rainbow, the likeness of the glory of God. And when Ezekiel saw this, he fell flat on his face. Too fearful, too weak, or too in shock to stand up on his own two feet, Ezekiel, some liken to the Church today, was powerless to do much of anything, let alone respond to the voice of God calling him to go out and speak God's message.<sup>i</sup>

For some that might be an encouragement – Ezekiel – like all of us believers, needed breath and spirit to stand up on his own two feet, hear what God wanted, and then follow it through. If God

can give strength to Ezekiel during a hard time in his life and in the life of his community, then God can give strength to the church today to respond to the hard challenges we face.

On the other hand, this kind of thinking spoken too soon might reinforce an idea we might have of ourselves that not much is expected of us because everything is too difficult and beyond, we think, what we as ordinary, indifferent people could be asked to do. We don't achieve our potential because we don't stand on our own two feet to try to do something to achieve it.

- I'm not going to change this relationship because nobody would ever take me seriously or listen to me.
- I'm not going to apply for that job because somebody like me would never be considered.
- I'm not going to do that course, or read that book, or learn that music because it's too hard.
- I'm not going to speak out about this situation because I might be expected to do something about it and people like me shouldn't get involved.
- I'm not going to ask questions about my faith because I don't want to reveal how little I know when I should know more.
- I'm not going to put my name forward for that team, or group because they'd never take someone like me.

Sound familiar? In fact, the Bible is full of people like that. Moses and Isaiah and Jeremiah, and here Ezekiel, were all like that. "Send, I pray, some other person." The shepherd boy David was reckoned to be too young and unimportant. Some of the disciples were pretty unsure about whether or not they should be following Jesus. What on earth did *He* see in the likes of *them*? Can you imagine the conversation Jesus must have had with the Twelve apostles when He commissioned them to go out into the countryside and tell people about the Good News. "So let's get this straight, Jesus", I can imagine the conversation going; 'You want me to go out and talk to people about faith, and tell them that they're sinners and need to change their ways, oh, and deal with some of their poor mental health issues, and do a little bit of healing the sick

too..."If the disciples had come from that quaint little fishing village in the west, Glasgow, you can easily imagine them saying to Jesus, "Aye, right."

But when they got on to their feet, and put their best foot forward, and started walking into places they thought they'd never visit, and doing things they thought they'd never do, they found, as we read in Mark's Gospel, that courage, and ability, and opportunity came to them. And they *were* able to do so much more than they ever thought would have been remotely possible. Out they went, in twos for courage and support, and things happened. Mark isn't too interested in the results of their mission; what he wants to show people like us is that if you have faith, even a hesitant faith, even a lead-footed faith, in Jesus, things happen. The prerequisite for their apostles' journey was to get on their feet, start walking, carry no excess baggage that would hold them back (physical or psychological or spiritual), and meet with people where they were with their needs and be surprised, delighted, affirmed by the way in which they were enabled to help, and make a difference.

The story of Ezekiel and the Apostles is a cautionary reminder that at the heart of the Church's life today is not a set of activities, but an encounter with the holy, an encounter that ought to knock us off our feet and leave us there until God gives us the strength to get on our feet, and move on.<sup>ii</sup> Whenever we are tired, or worn out, or overwhelmed, or feeling inadequate, or believing we're unworthy, these stories tell us that God is going to send our Church, sometimes sprawled out on the floor, sometimes worried about our financial giving, sometimes worried about not having enough volunteers to do all we want to do, to move, and to say to our community, in words and actions, "Thus says the Lord God." This is what we can offer our community, and we, to our surprise and eternal delight, can take our place in the public square, and say what we

believe, and show by how we act that our belief has heads and hearts and hands and feet. A belief that doesn't lie down, but with God's help, stands up on its feet, and engages.

I stayed up all night on Thursday, watching the General Election. Like others I had listened to the stories and promises and blandishments, and truths, and half-truths. I saw hundreds of vulnerable women and men offering themselves to be voted on by the public. Some may have been saints, and some were definitely sinners, but here were people, whether I agreed with their politics or not, who believed they could do something to change our country. We have a new Government and a new Prime Minister. The political commentator Rory Stewart wrote: "The stakes for Britain and democracy could not be higher. If Britain is to prove the exception in the global drift to populism Starmer must deliver and fast. And his path is hard." As it would have been for Rishi Sunak had he won.

Whatever the solution to our countries challenges, opportunities and ills, I have no doubt that part of that solution will be not only for politicians, in or out of Government, to get on their feet and walk those paths alongside people who are frightened or impoverished, or struggling to make ends meet, or trapped in jobs that don't pay enough, or don't have access to a GP or dentist, or can't find appropriate accommodation in which to live, or live in communities where crime is rife, or need to find ways in which people of different backgrounds, ethnicity, or generation struggle to live alongside each other in respect and support; but also, us.

The Prime Minister, and the Government, along with other people of good will, need to get on their feet so that pledges made on Friday about rebuilding Britain, about addressing cynicism in politics and the weariness at the heart of the nation and the lack of trust might be addressed if people of all political and belief systems, and none, recognised what Starmer said that public service is a privilege, *for all of us*.

I've preached worse sermons. But it brought to mind God's invitation and challenge to the young prophet Ezekiel, and Jesus' sending out apostles to speak and put into practice the Good News: "Stand upon your feet..." You might not have all the skills required, or the abilities necessary, or feel that you're good enough. But God knows differently. Encountering God and working with the rest of our community and country things can be done, and lives changed, and words spoken, and hope given. In your personal life; or with your family and friends; or at work; or in the Church. "Stand upon your feet..." and walk with God, and be amazed at what happens next.

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**

**Amen**

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<sup>i</sup> Andrew Foster Connors, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol 3, p194*

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid p196*