

**Sunday, April 30, 2017**

Forest Hills United Methodist Church

**Broad Series:** Grounded (The life of Jesus in four parts, Exploring Jesus as the incarnation of God in the created world, and how that gives salvation an earth grounding.)

**Series Part 4:** Dirty Heaven: Jesus' Appearances & Return

**Sermon #2:** "Walking in Vanishing Footsteps"

Rev. Dr. David Werner

**Scripture:** Acts 1:6-12

**Text:** "We walk by faith, not by sight." 2 Corinthians 5:7

**Sermon Blurb:** Wouldn't it be awesome if you could have daily conversations with Jesus, asking Him what to do, how to make decisions, what's coming? The problem is that Jesus is not physically present for us to ask these direct questions. How do we live as followers of Jesus in our every day life when Jesus does not tell us specifically what to do? This Sunday we'll discover how to follow Jesus when we don't see His footsteps in the dirt!

[*Setup: Tape paper footsteps across half of the stage.*]

Gathering Song: *Taste and See* -Sanctify

Gathering: Pastor David

Worship Set: Sanctify

*Great Are You Lord*

*Have It All*

*Rock of Ages*

Worship Prayer - Andrew

**Stay standing!**

Kids invited to Kids' Church

The Apostle's Creed, as understood by Michael Karan

Creed is what we believe, what we hold on to, what we stand on.

Interpreted by confirmation students: This time Michael Karan

Say it together.

**PPts:** Apostle's Creed, as understood by Michael Karan

**I believe in God the Father, who created everything.**

**And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our King, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, the Son of Mary, and suffered Pontius Pilate's persecution. He was crucified, killed and buried. Three days after death he arose from His tomb. He ascended into heaven and sits by God and shares His power. At the end of time He will judge who will live and die.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, and the church as a whole, and that believers who die will live forever, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of our bodies, and immortal life. Amen.**

Please be seated.

Prayers: Praying the Creed - Pastor David

I want to invite us to pray what we have just proclaimed.  
 It's not just what we stand in, what we believe, but it is also what captures us.  
 Let's go back to the creed, and take it in deeply.  
 Marvel at what it proclaims. Let it capture you!  
 Armando, another confirmation student, put the creed to images  
 Let's pray it through, as we see the images  
 Give God thanks for each wonderful and amazing truth  
 If you want the text, you can find it in the *Hymnal* on page #881. That may be helpful.  
 But, as the images come, give God thanks and praise in your heart, for each truth  
 Let's give thanks for what we have proclaimed.

**PPt Slid show:** Armando's Creed slide show

The Apostle's Creed, as understood by Armando Lorenzi

**PPts:** The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

Serve Moment: Food Drive - Helen Ash

Offering: *Shall We Gather at the River* - Sanctify

**Video:** Sermon Bumper

**PP#1:** Dirty Heaven: Jesus' Ascension

Walking in Vanishing Footsteps

"We walk by faith, not by sight." 2 Corinthians 5:7

Dirty Heaven: Jesus' Ascension. "Walking in Vanishing Footsteps." 2 Corinthians 5:7 "We walk by faith, not by sight."

**PP#2:** *Image of a person's feet walking in footprints, perhaps in the sand.*

[Object lesson with a volunteer walking across the stage following footsteps.]

- Choose a volunteer
- Start off on stage right, but on the ground.
- Paper footsteps trace a path across half of the stage, then vanish
- I tell the person to listen for my hushed voice, and to do what I instruct
- I, in a whisper into the microphone, tell the volunteer to start walking
  - Describing exactly as the footsteps lead
  - Up the steps and onto the stage
  - Across the stage, and up and over a chair
  - Down around the pulpit and back onto the stage
- Then, when the footsteps quit, I keep instructing
  - Across the stage, down the steps by the organ

- Down into the front pew, then climb over the pew
- Out to the aisle, and then up to a person sitting in a pew
- Tell them to talk to that person, first introduce yourself
- Share how you were able to do the obstacles along the path when the footprints didn't show you the way
- What did you have to do in order to follow the path?
- Person, you respond, "Thank you for sharing. Now I know what to do."
- Thank the volunteer, applause, and then back to his/her seat

For our message series, since Christmas, we've been walking in Jesus' footsteps. We've been with Him during His birth, and walking with Him during His earthly life. We've been learning who He is, what He was here for, and what we are called to. We've been invited to be followers of Jesus, and we've been learning to put our feet where He walked: training to keep in step with Him. We walked with Jesus to Jerusalem, to His trial, His crucifixion and to the tomb where He was buried.

On Easter we walked back to the empty tomb, and heard that He was raised from the dead! Then we saw Him alive again, and we worshiped Him, grabbing His feet. And we again committed to follow Him, to put our feet in His footsteps, to walk with the risen Jesus.

**PP#3:** *Image of Jesus' ascension.*

But today we come to a problem in our path. We follow Jesus to the top of the Mount of Olives. And as we stand there near Him, His feet leave the ground, and He rises into the heavens, back to God.

Jesus had come from God, from glory, but now Jesus returns to God, to glory. He leaves no more footsteps to follow! His footsteps vanish! How are we to walk with Jesus? How are we to follow Him? What does that look like? How do we do it?

I don't know about you, but this is a question I ask regularly. How I wish Jesus had actual footsteps for me to follow! If He would just tell me what to do, where to go, what to say, I could do it. But the problem is that I'm not always sure where I'm being led. I'm not sure what to do.

Now sometimes it's easy. I do what Jesus taught me. If I want a donut, and don't have the money, I leave it in the case. Do not steal. If someone cuts me off in traffic, I choose to forgive, and wave with *all* my fingers.

But sometimes the path is not clear. Do I keep my nice-paying job, or do I take the lower-paying offer, because it has more advancement potential. Which one? What do I do? Where do the footprints lead?

So, what do we do? Well, let's go back to the story where Jesus ascended back to heaven, and let's take a look at what those who were walking with Jesus discovered.

Turn to Acts, chapter 1. Luke, who wrote Acts, begins with Jesus ascension. Jesus and the apostles are gathered on top the hill next to Jerusalem called the Mount of Olives.

**PP4:** Acts 1:6-12 (CEB)

6 While the apostles were still with Jesus, they asked Him, "Lord, are you now going to give Israel its own king again?"

7 Jesus said to them, "You don't need to know the time of those events that only the Father controls. 8 But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world." Acts chapter 1, starting in verse 6.

“6 While the apostles were still with Jesus, they asked Him, ‘Lord, are you now going to give Israel its own king again?’”

OK, stop. All during Jesus’ earthly ministry, Jesus’ followers were hoping He would reestablish the political kingdom of Israel, and throw off the occupying Roman Empire. Jesus had tried to teach them, over and over again, that the Kingdom He was establishing was a spiritual kingdom of people’s hearts and lives, not a political government. But even now, after Jesus’ resurrection, and all the paradigm-shifting craziness they have experienced with Him, they still go back to what they understood before.

**PP#5: Walking in Vanishing Footsteps**

1. It might not be the path you expect

They still want things the way they want them. Jesus was offering something different, but they kept going back to what they hoped for. Jesus has to tell them that things are not necessarily going the way they expect. It hasn’t been that way so far, and it’s going to keep going that way. The future that unfolds might not be what you want.

Yes, Jesus will eventually return and recreate heaven on earth, and the eternal Kingdom of Israel. But they are missing what His purpose was while He was with them, what He had called them to do. Jesus, however, answers their literal question, not their intended question. He talks about the end times, and—spoiler alert—they don’t like that, either!

**PP6: Acts 1:6-12 (CEB)**

6 While the apostles were still with Jesus, they asked Him, “Lord, are you now going to give Israel its own king again?”

7 Jesus said to them, “You don’t need to know the time of those events that only the Father controls. 8 But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world.”

Verse 7, “Jesus said to them, ‘You don’t need to know the time of those events that only the Father controls.’” You won’t know! The Father controls it all.

**PP#7: Walking in Vanishing Footsteps**

1. It might not be the path you expect

2. You don’t need the roadmap.

You won’t see clearly when and what and how. You must keep walking, even without the specific roadmap. We’re only on an “as need to know” basis.

Walking with Jesus into the future means walking where we can’t see! It means going forward not knowing all the twists and turns. We know the next step—and the last step—but rarely any of them in between. So, then, how do we go forward? Let’s keep reading.

**PP8: Acts 1:6-12 (CEB)**

6 While the apostles were still with Jesus, they asked Him, “Lord, are you now going to give Israel its own king again?”

7 Jesus said to them, “You don’t need to know the time of those events that only the Father controls. 8 But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world.”

Verse 8, “But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world.”

They won’t have Jesus’ footsteps, but Jesus does not abandon them.

God is sending the third person of the trinity: the Holy Spirit. God will be with them, but in a different way. Before Jesus, God was *near* God’s people: God the Father spoke to them, gave them the law and covenant, spoke through the prophets, and guided them in a somewhat distant way. But then, in Jesus, God came *next* to His people. God became grounded, and walked in the dirt. God’s people could see, and touch Him, follow Him. As awesome as this was, God had something even better planned. If they didn’t give up having Jesus physically next to them, they would miss the better blessing. For now, God was coming even closer, God was coming *into* them. By the Holy Spirit, God was going to live in us, taking up residence in our hearts. And God’s power would fuel us, guide and direct us, step by step: His Spirit, guiding our spirits.

**PP#9: Walking in Vanishing Footsteps**

1. It might not be the path you expect
2. You don’t need the roadmap.
3. You don’t have the how, but you do have the what, the who, and the where.

We don’t have the *how*: the road map, the steps beyond the next one. But we do have the *what*. What are we doing? We are continuing on what Jesus started. We are helping more people discover Jesus, and His spiritual Kingdom in their hearts. And that also means bringing real changes to our world, making the word better, more like God wants. Jesus will come back some day and finish it, but for now, we continue to share Him.

We have the *who*. It’s us. We are sent. It’s also the Holy Spirit given in us. He is who pushes us from the inside, prompts us, guides us. We need to develop a listening to the Holy Spirit within us, to come to recognize that prompting for the next step. We must learn to rely on the Holy Spirit to power our steps with eagerness, zeal, and spring.

We also have the *where*. Jesus lays out where His ministry must spread into. First close by: in Jerusalem, the city they are in right then. And then, Judea, the wider country. Then in the adjacent areas: in Samaria, yes, even those rivals that they don’t like. But then, to everywhere in the world. That’s where you and I come in. We follow Jesus, and we share about Him with others, wherever we are at. We take Jesus and offer Him wherever we go.

So, having told them all this, having explained it all, then, Jesus ascends back to into the heavens.

**PP#10: Acts 1:6-12 (CEB)**

9 After Jesus had said this and while they were watching, He was taken up into a cloud. They could not see Him, 10 but as He went up, they kept looking up into the sky. Suddenly two men dressed in white clothes were standing there beside them. 11 They said, “Why are you men from Galilee standing here and looking up into the sky? Jesus has been taken to heaven. But He will come back in the same way that you have seen Him go.”

Verse 9, “After Jesus had said this and while they were watching, He was taken up into a cloud. They could not see Him, but as He went up, they kept looking up into the sky. Suddenly two men dressed in white clothes were standing there beside them. They said, ‘Why are you men from Galilee standing here and looking up into the sky? Jesus has been taken to heaven. But He will come back in the same way that you have seen Him go.’”

The first disciples are a bit like us. They wanted Jesus close by. They wanted His footsteps to follow. They wanted clarity. Now they didn't know what to do. "They kept looking up into the sky." They were sky gazers.

**PP#11: Walking in Vanishing Footsteps**

1. It might not be the path you expect
2. You don't need the roadmap
3. You don't have the how, but you do have the what, the who, and the where
4. Stop sky gazing!

So God sends a couple of angels to change their gaze. "Why are you just standing here and looking into the sky?"

God is still with them, helping them, giving them guidance even though Jesus had ascended. "Yes, Jesus will come back and finish it; He will come down just like you saw Him go up. But now, it is you who have feet on the ground. Get walking! Take the next step!"

**PP#12: Image of Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade *the leap of faith***

It is hard to know how to follow Jesus when we don't have Him physically around. And quite bluntly, He has told us, we won't have the road map.

We don't like this. We are control freaks. We want to know what's coming. We want to be in charge of where we are going, and how we get there.

But God knows we shouldn't. God wants us to learn to let Him lay out the way, and as we do, we learn to trust Him, learn to listen, learn to let Him lead. It's not about the destination; we know what that is. It's about the journey. And the journey is learning to trust in God, to surrender the clarity, and to simply take the very next step. It's walking by faith, not by clear sight.

**PP#13: Image similar to PP#2, but the person's feet waling in the sand, but not in footsteps.**

We walk in Jesus' vanishing footsteps. We are still here, down in the dirt, continuing Jesus' ministry, inviting others into life-changing relationships with Him in their hearts. We may want clarity, a road map, control. But as we continue to walk without that, we learn to trust. That's the point. We learn to listen to the Holy Spirit, taking us step by step, and never a step beyond what we need to know. We can't just be sky gazers, waiting for Jesus to show up and make it all clear. We move forward, in faith.

**PP#14: Image similar to PP#13, but many people's feet waling in the sand.**

This is true for us, as individuals, in our own lives. Stay in the same job, or take the other? Seek the Holy Spirit. Pray. Read the Bible. Consult Christian friends. Listen to the Spirit's inner nudging. We do this, you and me, in our lives. This is how we walk, one step at a time.

But we also do this together as a church. We've been seeking God's leading. Where is God taking us? What kind of church does God intend for us to be? We can't see clearly. We don't have a road map. But we do seek the Holy Spirit. We've been praying, each day, together. Be sure to text to get the daily prayer prompt! We listen to Scripture, and we been engaging consultants. This weekend was our major weekend of listening and learning. The consultants are going to propose the

next step they can see for us. After worship, our church leadership will be discerning with them God's next step for us. We listen to the Spirit's inner nudging. It may not be all laid out. Every step may not be clear. But we commit to walk in faith, and learn to trust.

**PP#15:** The Napkin Challenge *Image of a simple napkin by a dinner plate.*

“Holy Spirit, help me see one thing you want to show me.”

I'm going to ask the ushers to pass around baskets of napkins. Everyone gets one.

I want to invite you to take the napkin challenge for one week. It's a practice for each of us to develop the discipline of listening to the Holy Spirit, throughout each day. Before you eat each meal, I want you to pray an additional prayer in table your grace: I want us to ask the Holy Spirit to help you see the one thing He wants you to see.

So, at breakfast, we pray a prayer of thanks for the food. Then we also ask God to show us the one thing He wants us to see that morning: either a person, or a headline, or a sign, or an insight, or something that may resonate, or confirm or reject an option we are considering, or something we may need to do. Then, we pay attention throughout the morning for what God may be showing us.

The same at lunch. Pray grace for your food, and then pray “Holy Spirit, help me see one thing you want to show me.” Then, be watching throughout the afternoon.

Again, at dinner. “Holy Spirit, help me see one thing you want to show me.”

This is a way for us to develop a habit of seeking the Holy Spirit in our lives throughout the day. Walking in Jesus' vanishing footsteps means listening to the Holy Spirit guiding our next steps. It means asking the Holy Spirit to show you what you need to see, and then paying attention to what the Spirit reveals. If you notice something you need to do, do it! It's walking by faith, not by sight.

Try this for the next week, three times a day. Take your napkin with you, to help you remember. Carry it in your pocket or purse. Put it by where you eat. It is a call to prayer.

So, church, are you willing to take the napkin challenge with me?

Are you? If so, lift your napkins! It's white, it's a form of surrendering to God. You're letting God have control. And repeat after me.

I take up the napkin challenge!

Before each meal I eat

I will ask the Holy Spirit

To show me

What He wants me to see.

And then

I will pay attention.

So help me God!

Walking in Jesus' vanishing footsteps. So help us, God!

Amen.

**Closing Song:** *Build Your Kingdom Here* -Sanctify

**Benediction:** Pastor David

Meal prayer: Hold napkins and invite the Holy Spirit to show us what we need to see.