

A GIFT OF “DUST-FREE” FEET!
Mark 6:7-12
E. LeBron Fairbanks

Introduction

Near the end of each school year, I seek to speak to the campus community about our past few months together, and the summer months before us.

- A. In my final chapel message to you this school year, I want to offer each of us a gift—a gift of “dust-free” feet. Let me explain.
- B. In our scripture passage, Jesus was rejected by his hometown people.
 - 1. He felt his rejection keenly.
 - 2. Because of his rejection, he made a dramatic shift in his strategy.
 - a. He went out among the people, wherever they were...
 - b. Not just to the synagogue or among the Jews.
- C. He trained his disciples to go out two by two to multiply his ministry.
 - 1. He gave them authority to do what had to be done.
 - 2. With his own situation ringing in his heart...he gave them a way to face rejection and failure when sharing their faith.
 - a. “Shake the dust off your feet when you leave,” he instructed them.
 - b. A rather odd command at first, until we study it more carefully.
 - c. I have come to see that He is giving all of us an important principle when dealing with feelings of failure or rejection.

“Shaking the dust off your feet” when we leave means:

I. We are moving on!! (We will not remain in our failures.)

A. Not everyone will respond to our witness of Christ.

1. If they do – Great!
2. If they don't – move on!
 - a. We will not succeed in leading everyone to Christ.
 - b. Some will turn us down.
 - 1) What do we do?
 - a) Self pity
 - b) Hesitation to try again.
 - c) Morbid self-evaluation
 - d) Questioning our self-worth
 - 2) Christ's words to us – Move on!

B. For some of you, this school year feels like a failure.

1. Illustration: My nephew is a freshman this year at another Nazarene institution. He is a computer whiz. Brilliant! But, when asked by his parents about his low midterm grades for the first semester, he replied, "I've concentrated on my social skills!"
 - And so have some of you!
 - And your grades and perhaps your spiritual life have suffered!
2. For others, a promise of a budding relationship has been shattered...and you feel rejected.

3. And for some, even after intense efforts to mediate between family members, a feeling of separation, divorce, isolation or “shunning” has resulted. And you feel helpless.
 4. For most of us, some time during the school year...
 - a. A misunderstanding has resulted,
 - b. A goal has been thwarted,
 - c. A dream has been shattered,
 - And we feel betrayed, abused, rejected—a failure.
- C. Not every project we started turned out successfully. Not every goal we made was achieved. Not every word spoken was correct.
1. Sometimes we succeeded.
 2. Sometimes we didn't.
 3. There were disappointments along the way.
 - a. What are we to do?
 - 1) Hibernate into a corner?
 - 2) Refuse to talk to anyone?
 - 3) Wallow in self-pity?
 - 4) Hesitate to dream big dreams again?
 - b. Christ's way – MOVE ON!
 - c. During these times, we are to learn to close that chapter and go on to God's new chapter.

3. Jesus is saying to the disciples, and to us: Go on!! Don't indulge in self-incrimination or remorse. Go on to the next opportunity and be more dependent on God than ever before.
- E. Remember, failure is not a sin. Faithlessness is!
1. We need the faith to believe that failure can be the source of new dependence on God.
 2. Listen to these scriptural passages:
 - a. 2 Cor. 12:9 (Phillips) – *My grace is enough for you: for where there is weakness, my power is shown the more completely.* (The closing chorus captures this thought.)
 - b. Phil. 3:13-14 – *Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
 - c. Our failures can bring us to a new relationship with God.

Shaking the dust from our feet means...

#1--We are moving on.

#2--Secondly, shaking the dust off your feet when you leave means:

II. Leaving the past to God

- A. We view failure as anything which has not gone our way.
1. We continue to try to justify our failures.
 2. We want to straighten things out.
 3. We insist on battering down closed doors...

- a. While the Lord stands in an open door, beckoning us on.
 - b. The Lord says, "I'm over here."
 - c. We say, "But, I'm not yet finished over here!"
 - d. In his book, Failing Forward, John Maxwell states, "In more than 30 years of working with people, I have yet to meet a successful person who continually dwelled on his past failures."
 - e. I like Thomas Edison's perspective. He said, "I have not failed. I have just found 10,000 ways that won't work."
4. We can choose to trust Him to work where we have failed.
- Lord, I want to leave the past to You.
 - Lord, please help me to do what in my own strength I cannot do.
- B. Sometimes, circumstances are such that we are not able to walk away from a person or place where we believe we have failed.
1. In marriage, for example.
 - a. In these situations, we continually place our companion's future or past in His hands.
 - b. We pray, "Help me communicate your patience, love, and understanding."
 - c. We commit the mistakes of our marriage to God.
 - d. We ask God to take the broken pieces and shape us into a much different couple.
 2. This principle is true for our jobs and friends.

3. What about the sense of a “blown year”—academically...
financially...socially...or perhaps spiritually?
- C. Every major difficulty we face in life is a fork in the road. We choose which track we will head down—toward breakdown or break through.
1. Leaving the past to God is not the same as forgetting past failures.
 - We are products of our past.
 - Each of us has a story—part of which is beautiful, and part of which is painful, very painful.
 - a. The issue is coping. (How are we coping with our past, particularly with our sense of collective failure?)
 - b. Our coping mechanisms can paralyze us from moving on, or
 - c. Free us to accept what we did or did not do (or what others did or did not do),
 - d. So we can move on!
 2. Don't march into next year with your eyes glued to the past. Don't become paralyzed by the “whys” and “what ifs?”.
 3. Jesus is saying, “Shake the past from your shoes...leave the past to God.”

Finally, shaking the dust from your feet means...

III. Being confident of God's forgiveness in Christ

- A. There is a tenderness in the person who has faced failure and found Christ's forgiveness.

1. There is inner freedom in saying...
 - I have failed.
 - God has forgiven me.
 - The past is His.
 - I'm moving on!
 2. There is acceptance of others
 - So, they failed...
 - God will forgive them as he forgave me!
 3. This is not arrogance—but Christ-confidence.
 - a. It is what people around us really want
 - b. They need to see in us a way to handle their failures.
 - We can share our failure with another, and how God forgave us...and strengthened us through the loneliness.
 - We can communicate how God gives strength to an individual who is experiencing failure.
 - We can sing with assurance and conviction, “God is on our side.”
- B. Does this mean that we are not concerned about our failures, in not accomplishing what we set out to accomplish?
1. No, we are concerned.
 2. In witnessing, there really isn't such a thing as a failure. They might reject our invitation to Christ.

3. In raising a family, I'm not sure there is such a thing as failure. Yet decisions made by our children as they grow older may differ from our thinking as parents.
 4. Even in the midst of broken relationships and missed opportunities, and an apparent "wasted" school year, there is hope. God really is by our side!
 - Illustration: Suspended student, returned to MVNC. Emerged an SGA and sports leader. Today: "Suspension was the best thing that could have happened to me."
- C. Being confident of God's forgiveness means that...
1. We don't continue to dwell on things over which we have no control.
 2. We don't withdraw when we have failed to accomplish something we thought to be important.
 3. We don't entertain thoughts of self-pity when events and situations turn out differently than we wanted.
 4. We don't pout when we didn't get what we wanted.
 5. We don't continue to ask why, when we don't understand why
 - a. Sometimes our family, job, church, friends, neighbors, MVNC faculty or administrators will disappoint us or we have disappointed them.
 - b. Even more painful, sometimes, is when we have disappointed ourselves.
 - c. But, it's a dead-end street to continually ask, "What if..."

- 1) Jesus’ admonition to “shake the dust from your feet” means we can be confident of God’s forgiveness when we ask Him. Leave the past to Him. Move on! Amen!
- 2) Christ can transform our failures into avenues of His forgiving love to us.

Shaking the dust from our feet, then, means:

#1 – We are moving on!

#2 – We leave the past to God.

#3 – We are confident of God’s forgiveness in Christ.

Let me ask you, in conclusion

- A. What is the ultimate failure a person can experience?
 1. Would it not be to miss life eternal forever with God?
 2. Is not the purpose of life to truly know the Lord and to be shaped in the image of Christ?
 3. To miss this would be the ultimate failure.
- B. By comparison to our ultimate purpose, our little failures are put into perspective.
 1. Many people, in our nation, know little of daily failure—but are failing in the real reason for which they were born.
 2. While many of us as believers are upset with daily failures and focus on them because we have not been liberated from the binding grip of the fear of failure, or past failure.

- C. Look at our feet! Any dust on them?
1. The dust of past failures?
 2. Feelings of incompleteness?
 3. Feelings of insecurity?
 4. Feelings of worthlessness?
 - a. Shake it off.
 - b. There isn't anything we can do which will make God stop loving us.
 - c. Let's get on with the forgiven life.
- D. Back to the offer of a gift to you as you close this school year.
- E. I wish I could humbly wash the feet of everyone of you, symbolically freeing you to...
- move on,
 - leave the past to God,
 - and experience His forgiveness,

Why not take a few minutes at the chapel altar in prayer and receive from God Himself, not from me, this gift of “dust-free” feet.

- The altar is open for you as we listen to my favorite song this year:

His strength is perfect when our strength is gone;

He'll carry us when we can't carry on.

Raised in His power, the weak become strong.

His strength is perfect. His strength is perfect.