



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

4th Sunday of Easter-Year C-May 12th 2019

Readings: Acts 13: 14 43-52, Psalm 99, Apocalypse 7: 9 14-17,

John 10: 27-30

At the end of this morning's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Paul and Barnabas are expelled from Antioch in Pisidia. Their response to this rejection of the Word of God, we are told, was to shake the dust from off their feet. This might seem a strange reaction to us but was culturally normal for a devout Jew leaving pagan/hostile territory.

In contradistinction you may recall the story of Naaman the Syrian, healed by God through the ministry of Elisha. Knowing that he must return to Syria Naaman wants to continue to worship the one true God and arranges for a cartload of soil from Israel to be taken back with him. Then he can put his feet on holy ground while he prays.

I first encountered it in my own ministry when a Witness of Jehovah found his version of the Bible rejected on my doorstep and he announced that he would be 'departing and shaking the dust off his feet'.

Feet are a very sensitive subject with me. As a little boy I never wanted to go barefoot and kept these peculiar extremities safely hidden in my socks. I first learnt to lighten up about them when I heard the Bernard Bresslaw spoof of Max Bygraves' famous song, 'You need Hands'.

Bresslaw – a 6ft7in. Jewish comedian, star of Carry On films and Shakespearean actor, always played the well-meaning halfwit but he knew feet. He sang:

You need feet to stand up straight with.

You need feet to kick your friend.

You need feet to keep your socks up,

And stop your legs from fraying at the ends.

As Brits we tend to stuff our feet into our socks and shoes, pay them no attention and expect them to take us wherever we want to go – for life.

But in eastern cultures Feet take on a whole new significance and life of their own. I recall, when investigating the South Korean heresy of the Moonies, how shameful it was that Mr MOON, who claimed to be the Second Coming of Jesus, had endured the ignominy of his first wife hitting him with her shoe.

More recently we will all recall the toppling of Saddam Hussein, and men queueing up to thrash his statue with their shoes and thus humiliate him.

Feet go through the dust and muck and mire of the street. The easterner and the Biblical characters did not have the benefit of a pair of sturdy brogues to defend their feet from the indignities of the daily round in which the main street often passed for an open sewer and the country roads a constant irritation of hot dust. The ministry of the house servant was to greet the weary visitor, the traveller, and wash his feet – to clean away the filth and irritation of the journey, to refresh and relieve the pilgrim. It is not a job that you would want. Yet, as we know from Holy Week, that is the job that Jesus Himself took on. The Lord of Glory wrapped a towel around Him and knelt at the feet of His disciples and washed their feet. That is what He does for us. That is what He asks us to do for each other.

There are times when we may need to 'shake the dust off our feet' and walk away from those who reject the Word of God. But mostly we need to concentrate on keeping these long suffering and unconsidered servants in and on the Pilgrim Way. Blake's hymn, Jerusalem, asks the question, this time about the feet of Jesus. 'And did those feet in ancient times, walk upon England's mountains green?' They did indeed in the shoes of the missionary saints. Will Jesus walk here again? That, to a large extent, will depend on us.