

Taking Off Our Shoes

I have always quite fancied the idea of going to Glastonbury, not the place so much as the festival! I grew up with the Greenbelt Christian music festival and saw some great bands and discovered interesting speakers. But having grown up a bit, I discovered that I am really not a great camping fan, and what I really want from a holiday is a bit of peace and solitude. However I do enjoy watching highlights from Glastonbury each year on the TV and seeing others having lots of fun in the rain and mud. This prayer was written for a service based on Glastonbury – for some reason I remember focusing a lot on feet but can't for the life of me remember the Biblical text we used, though reading the prayer I guess it must have been Moses taking off his shoes at the burning bush "for this is Holy Ground"! Add in that I am quite fond of shoes and you'll get the gist of the thinking behind this one. And yes I think we did play the game where we each took off our shoes and muddled them all up, grabbed a shoe and had to find who it belonged to and think what it was like to be in their shoes!

Tall lace up boots
green wellie boots
strappy sandals
comfy slippers
smelly trainers
saucy stilettos
tatty brogues
flappy flip flops
lightweight crocs
doc martins
ballet shoes
creaky court shoes
cowboy boots
Jesus sandals
converse boots
pink party shoes

I'm sorry, did you say take off my shoes?
But my shoes say something about who I am
whether I'm into fashion or getting comfortably middle aged
whether I'm an extrovert or an introvert
whether I'm off to work or ready to let my hair down.

I'm sorry, did you say take off my shoes?
But without my shoes you'd have to see my feet
and that might be embarrassing
did I paint my toes, or might you see calluses and corns?
did I wash and deodorise, or might they smell?

I'm sorry, did you say to take off my shoes?
But without my shoes I'd feel undressed, exposed, naked
and in some cultures it might be seen as rude
without my shoes I might be taken for a hippie
or seem just plain ridiculous.

OK, so I've taken off my shoes
and I did warn you about the state of my feet!
This is holy ground?
It just looks like sun baked mud to me?

Bones of my ancestors?
The dreams of future generations?
The presence of God?
You want me to connect with the earth,
to walk in the moccasins of another
why didn't you say?
– I'd have gone to Glastonbury
and joined the green movement!

You want to wash my feet?
well I'm sorry but that's just going too far
that's not what a God is supposed to do
its not dignified,
its not part of your job description
how can we worship a God who washes our feet?
"I am who I am"
"I will be who I will be"
What's that supposed to mean?
I'm being stuffy?
I'm being pompous?
But that's what you're supposed to be God
confined to the pages of a book,
and argument between different philosophers
a doctrine enforced by the church
a noun, fixed and predictable,
not a verb, not wild and free and changeable!

Ok then, wash my feet and not just my feet but all of me!
Oh alright then, just my feet
but you know I'm really not comfortable with this washing the feet thing
or this "I am who I am" business.

After he had washed their feet
Jesus sat at table with his friends
and raised their gaze to meet his
they paused as the Passover party began
paused to remember
what it feels like to walk barefoot on the ground
paused to remember the ancestors
paused to dream of future generations
paused to recall what it feels like
to walk in the moccasins of others
And Jesus took bread and broke it
and gave it to them saying,
"This is my body, broken for you
Do this in memory of me"
And Jesus poured a cup of wine
and gave it to them saying,
"This is my blood poured out for you
Do this in memory of me"
For this is holy ground
bones of our ancestors
the dreams of future generations

this is the presence of God?

[share bread and wine]

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As we look at the pile of crazy mixed up shoes
we are challenged to find a pair that are not our own
not too comfortable, not too familiar
to walk in the moccasins of another
a reminder that it is "I am" who calls us,
"I will be" who sends us
to tread the earth gently
for this is holy ground
the bones of our ancestors
the dreams of future generations
this is the presence of God.

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