

Walking Our Talk Barefooted

by Susan Handle Terbay

There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustices,
but there must never be a time when we fail to protest. —Elie Wiesel

How often have we been asked to “walk our talk”? In other words, if we believe in a cause or we have a view regarding a certain injustice, then instead of just bemoaning the circumstances or just talking about it, we are asked to actually do something about it. Walking our talk is not necessarily easy, but what if we are asked to walk our talk barefooted? When we walk barefoot we feel the ground under our feet, which makes our feet subject to bruises, scratches, and cuts. Walking our talk barefoot is feeling our words and the depth of the injustice that in turn could subject our heart and soul to bruises, scratches, and cuts.

Our nation has a history of people “walking their talk,” whether it is regarding the differences of classes, violation of rights, or protest of wars. The March for Life in Washington, D.C., is an example. Many walk the March for Life to protest abortion, but to walk this particular talk barefooted means more than protesting abortion. I believe it means marching for “all life,” not just “selected life.” If we march for life then we walk against the vile treatment of our brothers and sisters who are gay and against the condemnation of our neighbors of cultures other than our own. We walk against the demeaning treatment of anyone for whatever reason. We hear the cry of the poor and do not ignore the child born into poverty. We walk against the use of the death penalty, and we seek other solutions to the sword-rattling speeches urging us to go to war. For if we are pro-life then we see God in not only the unborn but also in the lives of everyone outside the womb, including the woman carrying the unborn within her. We see God in our environment and in the creatures God so lovingly gave the world, and we stop the destruction of both.

When we seek to see God in another, we may even see ourselves in them. Is this scary? Yes. There are many who do not see God in everyone or everything. And let’s face it—it is extremely difficult to see God in person if his or her actions are evil. Jesus was certainly a victim of evil acts, yet what did he do? He asked God to forgive them. Jesus did not condone their actions, but he saw God’s image and likeness deep within them and wanting their souls to once again reflect his Father.

We also recently celebrated Martin Luther King Day in the United States, a day which honors a man who forced a nation to see the social injustice of many of its people, a man who walked his talk to Washington D.C. and other cities and encouraged all of us to walk with him. He walked his talk barefooted with the scars of those who suffered for so many years. Was it easy? No. So many people were against him, and it took courage and compassion to stand up for those who suffer the impact of racism and defilement of their humanity. There are many people throughout history who have walked their talk barefooted. Some who come to mind are Abraham Lincoln, Dorothy Day, Mahatma Gandhi,

Nelson Mandela, Sister Dorothy Stang, and Oscar Romero. They went outside of their comfort zones to walk their talk for those who were lost in society . . . those who were oppressed, ignored, brutally beaten, or destroyed. Who in our own lives do we know who walk their talk barefoot?

Jesus could have remained quietly in the background and taught others about God's dream for all of us, but Jesus took the path God asked of him and walked barefoot. He not only pointed out the errors of our ways; he also challenged us to change our ways. Because of this, many people found him anti-God, anti-law, and anti-their way of life. He walked his talk with courage and compassion . . . feeling the pain and frustration of the poor and those treated unjustly . . . challenging all of us to see God's image and likeness in all of creation. On the final path to Golgotha, Jesus carried the weight of our sins upon his shoulders and walked his talk barefooted, which not only bruised his actual feet but also his heart and spirit as well.

At the Last Supper, Jesus took a basin of water and a towel to wash the feet of the apostles. Jesus explained to everyone there; "You may not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand" (Jn 13:7.) I am wondering though if Jesus was not also looking at the feet of his followers, knowing the challenges and courage it was going to take to walk their talk barefooted; seeing the bruises, cuts, and wounds they were about to endure for him, both physically and spiritually. I like to think Jesus also was blessing their feet and not just cleansing them.

As we face injustices in our world, we have choices—we can talk about it and do nothing, or we can walk our talk and do something, which is good—or we can be even more open to Jesus' call and walk our talk barefoot. We might get some bruises or cuts, but following Jesus' teachings has never been about comfort. Jesus never said it would be easy, but it will be rewarded in heaven. As I write this column I know of my own limitedness, doubts, and fears. I am not sure if I can walk my talk barefoot. It scares me! Leaving a comfort zone of any kind is scary, but envisioning a smiling Jesus, with possibly a basin of water and a towel at the end of my journey, ready to bless my feet makes the contemplation of walking barefoot worthwhile.

As we walk with Jesus this Lent and Easter, may we find the courage and grace to kick off our shoes and take the chance and be open to continue to follow his teachings: *barefoot*.

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