



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“FOOTPRINTS OF FAITH”

Scripture Lessons: Daniel 1:1-21; 1 Peter 1:13-25

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, September 8, 2019
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

1 Peter 1:13-25

Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’

If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. For

‘All flesh is like grass

and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,

and the flower falls,

but the word of the Lord endures forever.’

That word is the good news that was announced to you.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, and even joyful in your sight, for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

As people who live on the coast, when we are called upon to picture in our mind’s eye what a set of footprints looks like, the image we often conjure up is that of those particular images of the impressions that people’s feet have left in the sand. And those footprints, not only do they demonstrate where someone once was, but there is also some indication of where a person was going.

Several years ago, during a pulpit exchange to Scotland, our family traveled to a particular beach called Tentsmuir (Tetsmier) Forest. It is an absolutely lovely place with miles of expansive beach, and on the northern most end of the beach one can find a variety of wildlife, including seals of all things. Harrison, our oldest son, had already begun his training for the upcoming high school cross country season, and so he decided to go for a long run...and off he went. Some time later, as the rest of us were thinking about leaving, it fell to me and Will to track Harrison down, and we decided to locate him by his footprints, but there were dozens of them on what was a popular day at the beach!

We quickly eliminated the barefoot prints as well as those that had been made by children's feet, though it was a little more difficult to differentiate between the adult footprints. After eliminating the shoes of the non-athletic variety, and after discerning from among the various other footprints those that were made by walkers as opposed to runners, we eventually found them. "Those are Harrison's footprints," we said, and so we followed them.

Now most of the time they ran in a straight line, though some times, we could tell that Harrison had worked his way around an incoming tide, or one time he hopped over a small stream feeding an emerging gully. Suffice to say, Harrison's footprints, they told something of a story. If truth be known, footprints always tell a story, but unlike footsteps in the sand, which are here one tide and gone the next, the footprints of our lives, well, they tend to linger much longer and in a variety of ways.

For many years now, we have all been encouraged to think about our footprints from within the context of our "carbon footprint," and minimizing it whenever possible. And whether that means driving more carefully or carpooling when we can, there are any number of things that we can do to be responsible stewards of this world that God has made and redeemed.

Or perhaps we have been encouraged to think about our footprints in terms of our "digital footprint." In today's world, it's scary, but where we go on the internet - the sites we visit, the videos we watch, the attachments we download - all of these things leave a footprint; indeed, and they communicate something about us long after we have turned off our computer. And so it is that there are actual footprints, carbon footprints, digital footprints, but what about our spiritual footprints? What about those footprints which say something not only about who we are, but also who God is?

Consider this morning's Old Testament Lesson from the Book of Daniel. Right away we see that Daniel's walk of faith is not easy. In this particular episode of Daniel's life, he is faced with the prospect of eating royal rations, which, by his estimation, would adversely affect his religious integrity...and so he refrains from doing so. Later in his life, he will be called upon to pray not to God, but to an earthly king. And again, as before, Daniel will hold to his faithful convictions. In fact, over and over and over again, Daniel will have the opportunity to leave his spiritual footprint upon the landscape of human history, and so it happens by God's grace, Daniel's footprints are like those of a giant!

And though our steps may appear child-like in comparison, and while ours will never be included within the cannon of Scripture, they are nevertheless impactful. I can't help but to think of the countless people who, in as many days, have faced their own lion's den - our

neighbors in the Bahamas, for example, people who faced what was for them a nightmare in the form of Hurricane Dorian. Stories are beginning to come out about tremendous acts of kindness and mercy, many of them initiated by mere Christians, faithful souls demonstrating something of the profound resiliency of the human spirit, and, though they may not bear the title “Prophet” or “Apostle,” their spiritual footprints are clear and visible.

Listen again to 1 Peter 1:23 - “You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.” It is interesting to think of our lives in that way, isn’t it - as having been birthed from an imperishable seed, which means that we are meant to endure...not only in terms of our life lived eternally with God, but the breadth of God’s Word also testifies to those deeds of ours which follow after us - our footprints. Oh to be certain...one day, the whole world is going to realize that everything we have witnessed throughout the course of human history is to be understood in light of God’s history. And when that happens, it will also be the case that the footprints of the faithful will prove to be an integral part of that story.

Which begs the question: “What exactly will our spiritual footprints reveal about who we are, and, more importantly, what will they reveal about the God to whom we belong? Just outside in the graveyard, there are four tartan corner markers, each of them indicating the general placement of the four corners of our church family’s original sanctuary, which was built back in 1734. Looking at that simple rectangular footprint, we are reminded of the legacy of faith that is uniquely ours, which was begun by those original 12 Scottish families, those 42 individuals, formerly of the (Circular) Congregational Church, who were first called by God to serve in this place.

Ah, think about their spiritual footprints for a moment...the baptisms...weddings...memorials - those benchmarks in their personal lives. The local missions / mission trips...churches organized, homes built...countless lives touched for the sake of Christ! Oh, and then there is ours, the latest footsteps among many. What will they look like and with what sense of urgency will they be taken?

There was a young boy, his name was Samuel Timothy Smith. He grew up in Louisiana, and, for the longest time, he thought that his mother’s husband was his father. But, one day, he found his birth certificate, and on it was the name of his biological father. It turns out that his biological father was a Major League Baseball player named Tug McGraw. He played for the New York Mets and the Philadelphia Phillies. Eventually they met, and, over time, they developed a relationship, but it was hardly anything like what you’d expect a relationship to look like between a father and a son.

Case in point, Tug wanted so little to do with this child of his that he had had so early in his life that he offered to pay for his son’s college if the son would more or less leave him alone. Over the years, they managed to get a little bit closer, and it happened that, when Tug was diagnosed with a terminal illness, the two of them began to make up for lost time. Eventually Tug died in his son’s home in Nashville. Samuel Timothy Smith was now a grown man and he had long since shortened his name to Tim, and those of you who know this story also know that, in the same year of his father’s passing, 2004, the son, Tim — now known as Tim McGraw

— he released one of his most famous songs entitled: “Live Like You Were Dying.” Tim has said that the song was not intended to be a tribute to his father, but that it was more therapeutic in nature; still as the title suggests, the song is about making our moments count...as if they were our last ones!

In ecclesiastical circles, the question continually comes in and out of vogue: “Would the church be missed if it were gone?” But maybe the question should be this: Would the church be noticed if it lived?” Because that is what we are called to do...to live as individuals and as Christ’s Church as if there were no tomorrow...and to leave our mark / to maximize our spiritual footprint; and to do this by giving hope to the hopeless, feeding the hungry, changing lives — our own as well as the lives of others!

This morning’s New Testament Lesson presents us with some beautifully simple insights, each of which would help to ensure that our footprints bear witness to a life that is holy and acceptable to God. We need not wait to live that life; it can be lived right now. Remember Daniel’s life? He never waited until the time was right before he “walk that proverbial walk.” In Daniel’s case, he was in exile; he had been taken from his home; he had been given a new name / a new vocation...nothing was going his way, and yet nothing would deter Daniel from going God’s way.

So on this Rally Day - indeed, everyday – let us take such blessed steps, and let us take them with great joy, for not only does God take them with us, but our steps will leave the kind of footprints that others will eventually see and perhaps follow; and, if we have walked well and wisely, and in the grace of God, they will one day say about the marks we leave - those are the footprints of a child of God! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.*