

PUT ON YOUR SHOES

There is a story by Hugh Price Hughes titled, "The City of Everywhere." In this story, a man arrives in a city one cold morning. As he gets off the train, he sees that the station is like any other station except for one thing everyone is barefoot. No one wears shoes.

He notices a barefoot cab driver. "Pardon me," he asks the driver, "I was just wondering why you don't wear shoes. Don't you believe in shoes?"

"Sure we do," says the driver.

"Why don't you wear them?" asks the man.

"Ah, that's the question," the driver replies. "Why don't we wear shoes? Why don't we?"

At the hotel, it is the same. The clerk, bellboys, everybody is barefoot. In the coffee shop, he notices a nice looking gentleman at a table opposite him. He says, "I notice you aren't wearing any shoes. I wonder why? Don't you know about shoes?"

The man replies, "Of course I know about shoes."

"Then why don't you wear them?" asks the stranger.

"Ah, that's the question," says the man. "Why don't we?

Why don't we?"

After breakfast, he walks out on the street in the snow but every person he sees is barefoot. He asks another man about it, and points out how shoes protect the feet from cold. The man says, "We know about shoes. See that building yonder? That is a shoe manufacturing plant.

We are proud of that plant and every week we gather there to hear the man in charge tell about shoes and how wonderful they are." "Then why don't you wear shoes?" asks the stranger. "Ah, that's the question," says the man.

On this Ascension Sunday, this story hits on all kinds of levels because the Ascension of Jesus is one of the basic tenants of our faith. Jesus did not die and spiritually go to heaven; he physically rose from the dead. Jesus did not stick around to set up a physical kingdom on earth with armies and cities named after him. Jesus physically ascended into heaven and we await his coming again. And when Jesus returns, he brings with him the Kingdom of God that will fundamentally change everything in our universe. This is not a doctrine of our faith that is open to interpretation or

change, every Christian believes in the death, resurrection, ascension, and return of Jesus Christ. But why don't we act as if Jesus is returning soon, perhaps today, and wear the shoes of our faith? Ah, that's the question! It's one thing to have a shoe factory and hear words from people like me about the benefits of wearing shoes of our faith, but we all must actually put on our shoes. Are you with me?

I was at a Chrysalis team formation meeting yesterday and I talked about the depth, height, and breadth of God's love for all people. I proposed at the end of the talk that each person should act as if they believed that God loved them, to accept the love of God for 72 hours, and see how grace fits on the shoes of their heart. In the feedback team, one very dedicated Christian woman person said that she

was really challenged by that statement, to live for three days as if God loved her. Really? That is a challenge? To live and act and speak as if we accepted God's love for us? Really? This is difficult? Now I'm not criticizing her, those are rhetorical questions, for all of us, including me. It's like we meet every week at the shoe factory here, and listen to the wonders of shoes and the benefits shoes bring to our lives in an immediate and positive way, and then take off our shoes when we leave this place and go about our daily lives barefoot.

"Okay, in this shoe factory, all of this makes sense, but out there in the real world, preacher, Christianity is just one lifestyle among many that are good choices for people. People can wear newspapers on their feet, they can have

rubber pads glued to their feet, even stainless steel plates can be tied on, there are many valid and good choices of footwear." I would say Amen to that, that there are many ways to live in this world, some believing in a higher power, some not, and yes, you may get a benefit out of these other lifestyles...wearing those other foot coverings...but seriously, the best way, the truth of the matter, and the only Life that makes sense is to daily wear the shoes of God's grace through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ our Lord. This makes sense here in this shoe factory, and it makes sense in our everyday lives, just put on your shoes, and live your life knowing by faith that God loves you, God made you, and God has a purpose for you through the power of the Holy Spirit!

What is that purpose? Jesus told his followers: "and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." And as you read the stories of the early church through the book of Acts and in the letters of the New Testament, you will come to understand that all of Jesus' disciples did not wear the same shoes of faith. Some of them had shoes of martyrdom, some had shoes of service, some shoes of healing, some teaching, some prayer and speaking in other languages...but they all had their shoes on and were ready at all times to talk to barefoot people about the joy of wearing shoes, the joy of accepting the grace of God, the joy of following Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit of God.

So come, get your shoes from this table, and don't just carry them around for people to see...put on your shoes, put on the shoes of faith, put on Christ, and you will find a New Balance in life, a Reeflex of love through your Reeboks of Jesus, and especially the power to Just Do It, with the swoosh of grace in every step. Put on your shoes, and live like Jesus loves you...Amen!