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Ephesians 4:25-5:2

“These boots were made for walkin’”

Do you ever get discouraged about how BAD the world has become? Are you frustrated with younger generations? Do you wish things were more like they used to be, more like those “good old days”?

You’re not alone. Let me share a couple quotes:

Children now love luxury. They have bad manners. They have contempt for authority. They show disrespect to elders and endlessly chat with each other, instead of exercising. They are tyrants, and expect to be waited on, rather than helping out. They contradict their parents, monopolize conversations when company comes....gobble up food at the table and tyrannize their teachers.

Here’s another:

I have no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the frivolous youth of today. Young people are reckless beyond words. When I was a boy, we were taught to be polite and respectful with adults, but youth today are smart-mouthed and show no respect or restraint.

Well, guess what? The first quote is from Socrates of ancient Greece. The second is from Hesiod who lived 800 years before Christ.

We CAN get discouraged about how “bad” the world is and long for “good old days”, but in reality those good old days are an illusion. Age-old struggles persist throughout centuries.

I came of age during the 1960’s, graduating from high school in 1968. It’s easy to idealize that era—seeing it as sweetly naïve. It was a time that called for us to live simply in peace with one another, and wear flowers in our hair.

But it was also the time that produced the song, “These boots were made for walkin’”-- remember? Those who are old enough likely remember Nancy Sinatra singing these lines:

*You keep lyin’, when you oughta be truthin’/
And you keep losin’ when you oughta not bet.
You keep samin’ when you oughta be a changin’
Now what’s right is right, but you ain’t been right yet.*

*These boots were made for walkin’
And that’s just what they’ll do.
One of these days these boots are gonna walk all over you.*

I actually hated that song. I wanted to believe people could live in peace and enjoy flowers. But life isn’t all peace and flowers. And the good old days weren’t so wonderful really.

I do not believe we’ve made NO progress in thousands of years of human history. We have made some. Blacks were still being lynched in the late 1940’s when my parents married and started their family. I am grateful for God’s leading which is helping us to change this world. But we still grapple with ancient struggles: violence within families passed on through generations, criminal behaviors that ensnare youngsters before they have the wisdom to recognize the tragedy of their choices, sexual abuse and exploitation, racism, prejudices, hatred.

Life is filled with pain and struggles, evil and wrongs, both the kind that are DONE TO US, and the kind WE DO TO OTHERS. This can really get us down. It can lead to depression or despair. It can make us angry.

What is our response? We may become bitter and follow Nancy Sinatra’s example, pulling on our “boots” to go out and tromp all over people in various ways.

OR we reject the world. We put on our boots and walk out on the world, looking for a safe haven for ourselves and those we love.

NUMBER ONE: This doesn’t work. We can’t walk out on the world because the world is everywhere. Evil is in ALL places----- EVEN IN US. It’s a broken world and all of us are broken- sinners in need of redemption.

NUMBER TWO: Neither raging through the world in a boot tromping frenzy, NOR tromping away from the world in a huff- Neither of these is a Christian response to the world. If we have decided to follow Jesus, he’s got boots for us to wear, and ways for us to wear them.

When we were little, all of us, we learned to walk. We walked carefully. We wobbled. We stumbled and fell. We started with bare feet, then moved to shoes, then on to boots. We practiced every day. We watched bigger folks, to see how to do it. We watched brothers and sisters. We watched our parents. Sometimes we even put on their shoes, and tried to walk in them. Literally!

Friends, we are GOD'S CHILDREN. And God calls us to walk in his footsteps. God knows we'll be unsteady at times. But God's call is still clear. God came to us in Jesus, to SHOW us how to walk. And God's Holy Spirit is with us now, to sustain us as we walk. God's Spirit breathes through the words of the Bible to give us pointers on how to walk.

We are called to pull on our boots to walk like Jesus. In his letter to the church in Ephesus Paul wrote: *Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious, but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us, but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.*

We, like Jesus, should not CONDEMN the world, but should walk in the world with LOVE. The Scripture tells us that our boots, our CHRISTIAN boots, were indeed made for walkin'--- walking in love. Paul's words give us a description of these boots.

First: NO MORE LIES. Don't misrepresent yourself; be transparent; be true and real. It's ok to not be perfect; it's sick and self-destructive to pretend we are.

Second: BE ANGRY, but don't stay angry, don't go to bed angry, don't use your anger to plot or execute revenge. It's not a sin to feel anger. The sin lies in what we do with it. In the words of our translation, letting anger take you over, nurturing anger in your soul, lashing out to hurt in anger—all of this is letting the Devil get a foothold in your life. It will destroy you- eat you alive.

Third: Don't steal. But not just so you can be respectable and law abiding. Commit yourself to honest work to acquire what you need and then SHARE what you acquire with OTHERS in need. This can be understood as a "NO HOGGING" principle- which can be applied to most Americans and westerners in a piercing way. (Demographics tell us that if the world was one village of 100 people, 60 would be Asian, 14 African, 12 European, 8 Latin American, and 5 North American- from the US and Canada. 5 people would control 32% of the world's wealth, and all of them would be U.S. citizens. 67 would be unable to read. 1 (only ONE) would have a college education. 50 would be malnourished. 1 would be dying of starvation. 80 would live in poor housing. 24 would not have any electricity. 33 would have only contaminated water. 7 people would have access to the Internet.—Food for thought.)

Watch what you say. Words can wound beyond what we imagine. I love the way The Message translation puts it: Say only what helps, each word a gift.

Finally, be kind. Reach into your heart to find tenderness. Forgive others as quickly and thoroughly as God forgives you.

Let's think about kids for a minute. Kids are definitely not perfect. They can drive adults to distraction. But they can touch our hearts with tenderness in profound and moving ways. We watch them imitate us, walking in our footsteps and in our shoes, practicing BEING LIKE US. (Wow. What a realization). When we see this, we want to be the best people we can possibly be.

That's what God wants for all of us. When God watches us stumbling, his heart is filled with love and tenderness, the way our hearts are moved when we watch little ones in our lives. Christ has specially made boots for us. He holds them out asking us to give them a try. For sure, the boots are big, our feet don't really fit yet, we aren't very steady in them—but that's ok. We are trying. We can take a few steps. We can step over lines that the world draws, lines that God wants erased. We can walk in them! We can walk, into the world. The God of love holds our hands!
Amen. Amen.

(Invite folks to find a baby photo to put on their desk or frig this week. Celebrate how far you have come. Recognize to God, you are still a baby. Be intentional about seeking God's footprints to walk in each day.)