

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Feb 5th 2015

Life is hard, and we all have our demons. Certainly some of us seem to have more demons to battle than others.

I've never heard of anyone putting demons on their wish list. I've never heard anyone say, "My goal this year is to encounter and battle deep grief and insecurity and hopelessness following betrayal and abandonment!" or "I can't wait to encounter and battle despair and depression and substance abuse. I hope that happens to me soon because I just know I will be stronger and wiser and more compassionate for having had that experience!"

No one says or wishes for those things. We don't typically choose our demons, but we all have them. We also owe it to ourselves to find the courage to look them in the eye, expose them, and give the battle our best shot.

Some of life's deepest wounds and consequent most stubborn demons are those that follow injury or neglect from those with whom we have been most exposed and most vulnerable: husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers and best friends. When the very people who should care for us and stand with us betray our faith, the wounds go deep. When our faith communities turn their backs on us in our despair, we are left alone outside the doors of the Church to fend for ourselves and fight back against their judgment.

Vulnerability is life's greatest dare, and yet this is how Jesus tells his disciples to travel: "He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick – no food, no sack, no money in their belts. They were, however, to wear sandals but not a second tunic." And then Jesus tells his disciples to enter the homes, the most intimate spaces of the people they visit, and to stay right there until they leave the area. The call is to walk with vulnerability, and to meet and stay with people in their most vulnerable places. This, it seems, is a fundamental and requisite component of the disciples' authority over demons.

But what happens when we are not welcomed? Or where we were previously welcomed but have now been rejected? What happens when we are hurt, cast aside, replaced, ignored, abandoned, invisible or worthless in the eyes of people who should rightly welcome and care for and value us? What are we to do? Is "moving on" the right thing to do? And how? How can we leave our injuries and past lives behind? How are we to fight those demons?

Jesus has told us to keep our shoes on. When we are not or no longer welcome in places that have been or should have been our homes, He doesn't want us to stay, subjecting ourselves to further abuse and injury. "Leave there," He says, "and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them." And shake the dust off your feet, you must, for those are the demons that will haunt you if you don't leave them behind. This too seems a fundamental and requisite component of the disciples' authority over demons.

Shake the dust off your feet! It will be all the testimony we will ever need or want against those who should have loved us and welcomed us and stood with us. Move on, don't look back, and don't feel the least bit badly about it. This is exactly what Jesus has told us to do. Our authority is in our freedom and directive to stand up and walk away. We have our marching orders.

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