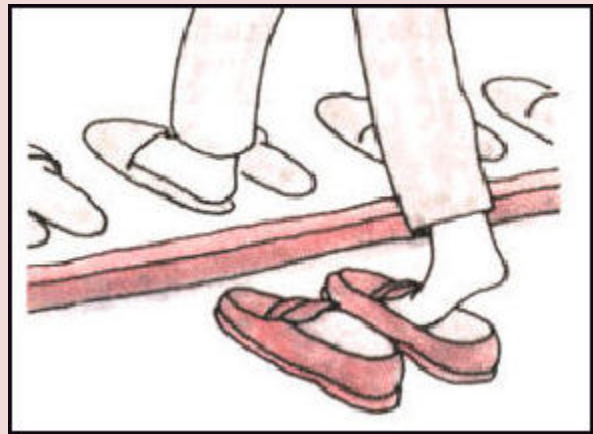


FIRST AND CENTER
Pastor's Blog
May 2, 2018

It's 89 degrees outside today in Hartford! I took my shoes off and stood in the warm grass outside the Church House this morning, which felt so good. That got me thinking again about Korea and the issue of shoes.



In Korea, you take your shoes off at the threshold of a home or office every time you enter. Usually, there are slippers supplied for guests to put on. Sometimes Koreans go socked or barefoot, but often they also put on slippers. In fact, when you sit down on Korean Air flights, you find a packet on your seat that includes a pair of thin slippers for your flight!

We have done this at our house for years, starting when the children were small and we valiantly tried to keep the floors to some semblance of clean because they played on them! But we still do so today, children grown. Taking your shoes off signals leaving the world out there, getting comfortable, being at home in more than a geographical sense. When you are asked to do so in a stranger's home, the signal is given immediately that you are family, formalities of footwear can end.

The part that surprised me, however, came as the Pastor of the Korean church where I preached and I approached the chancel (a couple of steps up where the pulpit was) for the first service that Sunday. We slipped off our shoes at the lowest step and put on a pair of slippers set there for our use. Suddenly, I was back in the Bible, where you take off your shoes when you are standing on holy ground. I was back in the Middle East where you take off your shoes before you enter a mosque. Close to the earth, close to God: holy ground.

In the West, I fear we have lost the sense of Holy Ground. Sometimes people feel that way about special natural wonders, but don't take shoes off because God is not necessarily associated with mountains here. God calls Moses to take off his shoes before approaching the burning bush. Why? Holy Ground: A place where you want nothing between you and the Spirit. A place too sacred to touch with anything but your sacred body, created in the image of God.

I'm not sure I can convince all the good folk at Center Church to take off their shoes when they step up to the Communion Table or the Pulpit, but somehow, I think our spiritual lives would be enhanced by reminding our bodies that Holy Ground exists all around us. Maybe the closest we can get is taking off our shoes on a warm May day after a long cold winter, feeling the grass, and praising God for it.

~ The Rev. Shelly Stackhouse
Transitional Pastor