

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,
but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk
or a snooze in the sunshine.
I don't want enough of God to make me love a black man
or pick beets with a migrant.
I want ecstasy, not transformation.
I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth.
I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.
I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.

The Reverend Wilbur Rees' poem is as evocative as it is convicting. If I had editorial license, I would change a few words, perhaps to make the poem more palatable, more acceptable to a broader, more diverse group of people. But I don't have the authority to edit this poem, and it's easy enough for you to change the words to fit your own heart's fears. "I don't want enough of God to make me love...whomever I most fear or irrationally loathe." I trust that you can fill in the blanks of this honest, thought-provoking, borderline-offensive poem.

I suppose I find the poem offensive because it speaks to a truth I sadly recognize in my own heart. I want the God upon whom I can call. I want the God who accepts me as I am, who sustains me at the communion table, who claimed me in the waters of baptism before I could respond, who loved me then and loves me now and will love me for eternity. I want the God who breaks into my life in holy moments: the one I notice in the joy of children's faces as they run to church school; the one who paints the sky purple during my evening commute, the one to whom we sing Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of love. And what's more, I want that God for you. "Remember who you are and Whose you are," I remind the children—and I hope you grown up children hear it, too. You belong to God who gave us all to each other to love. I desperately want you to know that. And I want those moments of in-breaking in your lives—of your seeing God in the faces of the guests at Broad Street Ministry or Face to Face or Our Brother's Place, of your seeing God in the faces of each other as you tend to each other's illnesses and griefs, of your seeing God as God's majesty is revealed in the created world: in a seed that sprouts in the garden, or a thunderstorm that lights the night sky with lightning bolts, in solar eclipses and the deep green of a grasshopper—in moments when you turn aside and notice the holy.

Last week we read in worship the story of Moses at the burning bush. If you were here, you might remember that I asked the children to remove their shoes, as Moses did when he turned aside to see a bush that was burning, yet not consumed—a bush out of which God was speaking to Moses, instructing him to take off his shoes because the ground upon which he was standing was holy. Last Sunday, I asked the children to tell me what they could notice when their shoes were removed that they could not notice while their feet were protected inside their shoes. Murphy's law of children's sermons ensued, and the children did not respond. You see, it is always the case that when I want them to talk, they are silent, and when I want them to listen, they have much to say. Perhaps in this way, we might also recognize the image of God in them—a God who will not be tamed, manipulated, or controlled the way I want. At any rate, the point I had intended to make in last week's children's sermon is that when we take off our shoes, we are connected, grounded to the place where we stand. From this place of standing firm in our identity and context, we are more inclined to notice things about our surroundings—the texture or temperature of the floor, for example—or perhaps, when we take the time to remove that which protects us, we are more able to turn aside to see the in-breaking of the holy, and to hear the call of God, to experience the theophany—the holy in-breaking of God—our metaphorical burning bushes.

Before I came to this church, I used to remove my shoes while I was preaching. The combination of my 5 ft 4 inch stature and the height of this massive pulpit are not conducive to that practice, but I remember loving the imagery and the idealism of the gesture. I loved having a physical reminder that when I preached, I wanted to be grounded. I wanted to feel connected to the place in which I was preaching and to the people sitting in the pews. I wanted to be reminded of both the gravity and the holiness of presuming to speak the word of God to a people in need of hearing the good news.

Last Sunday afternoon I sat down in my office to read *this* week's Exodus story after most of you had gone home. I was still beaming from sharing the burning bush story with the children and having them leave their shoes off as they made their way to church school and painted their own burning bushes with marbles and acrylic paint that doesn't wash out of clothing. (Talk about a metaphor for the wildness of God!) Last week was one of those weeks when I felt the holiness of this call, when I saw in your faces the face of God as I served some of you communion in the pews or talked with you during coffee hour.

So you might imagine my surprise last Sunday afternoon, when I noticed for the first time in the Passover story I've read perhaps hundreds of times, that Moses and Aaron and all the company of Israel are specifically instructed by God in *this* story to leave their shoes on their feet. Truth be told, if I had waited until Monday morning to read this week's scripture passage, I might have missed the connection, the reversal. Word for word, it goes like this: out of the burning bush, God says to Moses, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." But in the instructions for the Passover, the final plague in which God will kill every firstborn, both human and animal, of households that do not follow God's instructions of painting the blood of a lamb upon the doorposts and lintel piece, God commands, "This is how you shall eat [the lamb]: your loins girded, *your sandals on your feet*, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly."

This week's text is problematic for us for a number of reasons, not least of which is the fact that God destroys people who oppose the Israelites, seemingly to make a point. As we move through Exodus over the next few weeks, we will perhaps devote some time to this unsettling reality of our sacred text. But what hit me like a ton of bricks last week as I sat in my office, shoes still off, heart still lifted by the glorious music that filled our sanctuary and the other holiness-laden events of the morning, was this: there is a time to take off our shoes and to stand on holy ground, and there is a time to lace up our shoes and get moving into the wilderness where God is sending us. Today's epistle to the Romans puts it this way: "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep."

It is time for us to wake up to the injustices that swirl around us. To DREAMers who now fear for the only lives they've ever known because our leaders are not compelled by compassion or even pragmatic facts. Wake up and keep your shoes on: God is calling us to speak up for those who are no longer in a position to speak up for themselves, to welcome the stranger because we ourselves were once strangers in Egypt.

It is time to wake up to the devastation that is taking place even as we worship—and as we continue to wreak havoc on a planet entrusted to our care and stewardship. It is time to wake up to bigger, more deadly, more frequent storms that steal the lives of our neighbors and disproportionately affect the poor. Wake up. Keep your shoes on. The people in the wake of Harvey and Irma are going to need our help, and God is calling us to "owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."

This love that is required of us, that costs us more than \$3 of God, isn't the same as sending "love and prayers" over social media outlets. It's keeping on our shoes and double knotting the laces. It's sending a check to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance now and marking our calendars to send another check six months from now or to literally pack up and go to the places that are still in need when the media has moved on but the outpouring of help has dried up. Love isn't just sitting at our kitchen countertops and shaking our heads at the injustice of deporting hardworking students and young people who came to this country through no fault of their own. It is keeping on our shoes and double knotting the laces. It's bombarding our lawmakers' phones until they yield to human decency, to the better angels of our nature.

Here's the thing: I think you and I want more than \$3 worth of God. Sure, we have our limits. We all want God to be *for us* without sending us into the wilderness to be *for God*. But you are a people who have been wrestling with the big questions long before I came here. I think you are mostly unafraid to go out into the world with your shoes on. But it is time, once again, to wake up. To be reminded that the God who calls to us on the mountaintop from burning bushes also expects us to lace up our shoes. Volunteer to teach church school, not because I have begged you, but because you believe in telling the story of God to the next generation. Host the youth group for a meal at your place or come to dinner church on the last Sunday of the month because you know God feeds us so that we can be at work in the world. Invite a friend to church next week because the God you serve doesn't come in \$3 increments. The God you serve is worth your life.

In the name of the One who was revealed to Moses as the great I AM, the one who calls you to holiness and to holy work, Amen.