

## **Walk A Mile In My Shoes**

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021 – Mark 1:29 - 39 & 1 Corinthians 9:16-23)

I want to read to you the first two and last two verses of a poem written in 1895 by Mary T Lathrap. It's called 'Judge Softly', sorry about the sexist language – read man and woman where it says man, brother and sister where it says brother.

“Pray, don't find fault with the man that limps,  
Or stumbles along the road.  
Unless you have worn the moccasins he wears,  
Or stumbled beneath the same load.

There may be tears in his soles that hurt  
Though hidden away from view.  
The burden he bears placed on your back  
May cause you to stumble and fall, too.

...

Brother, there but for the grace of God go you and I.  
Just for a moment, slip into his mind and traditions  
And see the world through his spirit and eyes  
Before you cast a stone or falsely judge his conditions.

Remember to walk a mile in his moccasins  
And remember the lessons of humanity taught to you by your elders.  
We will be known forever by the tracks we leave  
In other people's lives, our kindnesses and generosity.

Take the time to walk a mile in his moccasins.”  
~ by Mary T. Lathrap, 1895

I am sure you have heard the phrase walk in their shoes/moccasins. In the book 'To Kill A Mockingbird' Atticus Finch is sharing some wisdom with his daughter Scout and says this kind of empathy is important.

*“If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his (sic) point of view, until you climb inside of his (sic) skin and walk around in it.”* (Atticus Finch in *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee)

Maya Angelou speaks about this kind of empathy and the courage it takes when she says *“I think we all have empathy. We may not have enough courage to display it.”*

The Collingwood Football Club this week has been embarrassed and challenged this week, to walk in the shoes of its African and Indigenous players. They have been challenged to truly understand the racism those players have experienced at the club.

Every Australia Day, we White Australians are challenged to walk a mile in the shoes our First Nations People (wonder if we ever will have the courage to do this). Our four Australians of the Year this year (all women) whilst promoting their own causes have all

challenged us to this. She Senior Australian of the Year was Miriam Rose who I introduced you to last year along with her work on Dadirri, deep listening.

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians exhorts them to walk in the shoes of another. When sharing with slaves, understand their situation a little, same with Jews, same with those who are religious and those who are not. Same with those who are weaker.

I worry about his comment that we need to be all things to all people. I am not sure we are required to knock ourselves out understanding every group of people, rather it is about understanding those we work with and live with.

Paul, I think is talking about empathy, about walking a while in someone else's shoes so that we can understand the world from their perspective.

When I began working with clients who lived with dementia 15 years ago, I knew nothing about dementia. It was only as I gained their trust and asked questions that I began to understand a little of what life for them was like. Same thing happened when I began working with Persian Asylum Seekers, when I asked questions and built relationships with them, then they began to tell me their stories, and then I began to understand their situation.

When some of us began serving soup and bread to the homeless last year and asked them about who they were and what they needed did we began to understand homelessness.

Empathy – this is the Jesus way!

Empathy is about:

- Dignity – not judging another, rather treating them like yourself and conveying to them that they are important and loved
- Respect – that they have some truth to share with us
- Embracing their condition – really trying to see the world in the way they see it
- Solidarity – really standing with another, joining with them
- Humility – all of this takes humility, we cannot assume we know what life is like for them, we must let them speak and really listen
- Curiosity – it is about asking questions (albeit it gently). What is it like for you? How do you understand the world? What do you think?
- Listening – deep listening, listening without judgement, listening without speaking, listening without trying to offer answers or solutions
- More than sympathy – feeling sorry for others is okay but if that is where it ends it can feel a bit patronizing, we still maintain the power in the relationship.
- Power with not power over

Our mission requires us to walk a mile in another's shoes. This is how Paul says we must proclaim the gospel, and proclaim the gospel we must.

This is the way of Jesus, in our reading from Mark, Jesus enters the house of a woman, meets her in her everyday life, meets her in the midst of her ordinary space and

***Walk A Mile In My Shoes***

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021 – Mark 1:29 - 39 & 1 Corinthians 9:16-23)

situation. Into that situation he brings healing and life. He then goes on to respond to others afflicted by all kinds of things and responds with compassion.

When I began my theological studies, I remember a Professor saying all the time, drumming it into me, that theology should always be clear, relevant and understandable or else it served no purpose.

Walking in the shoes of another for a time will help us ensure that the good news of God we share is clear, relevant and understandable.

To show such empathy will be to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Let's walk this way together in 2021 and see where it takes us.

Amen.