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COVERED WITH YOUR RABBI'S DUST

I would like to get better about doing the right thing.

- Not just in the big things, but also in the little things, the subtle things where nobody notices.
  - Because it's so easy to let those small things slip away.
- You see, I think it is what we do in those smaller moments
  - the endless choices that we make that shape us into who we are as people of faith.

JESUS commanded His followers to wash one another's feet like HE had just performed for them.

- "Do you understand what I have done for you?" HE asked them. "You call me 'TEACHER' and 'LORD' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your LORD and TEACHER, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet."

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You all are very familiar with the story of JESUS and HIS disciples, where the disciples are in a boat and it is the middle of the night and there is a storm raging all around them.

- And JESUS comes walking out to them on the water.
  - At first, they think HE's a ghost, but because it looks like HIM, they call out, "JESUS, is that YOU?"
- And when JESUS says, "Yes," Peter gets out of the boat and starts walking toward JESUS on the water.
  - What is Peter thinking and why does he believe he can walk on water?

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Now this story makes a lot more sense if you understand the historical background of JESUS relationship with HIS disciples.

- Remember, the disciples call JESUS "TEACHER."
  - The Jewish word for "TEACHER" is "RABBI".
- So, Jesus is a Jewish rabbi with Jewish disciples.

Most Jewish boys and girls around the age of six would go to school for the first time.

- And the entire education system, in fact the whole Jewish way of life, is based on the Torah, the first five books of the Bible given by Moses.
- The children come to learn the Torah, actually memorize the Torah,
  - and their teacher is the rabbi in the local synagogue.
  - This first level of education was called Beit Sefer and lasted until the child was about ten years old.
- By age 10, the child would have the entire Torah memorized—every word—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Now by the end of Beit Sefer, most kids were no longer going to school.

- They were apprenticing in the family business, the family trade or learning how to manage a household.

But the best of the students would keep going to the next level.

- They would continue in what was called Beit Talmud and memorize the rest of the Hebrew scriptures—the entire Old Testament, from Genesis through Malachi.
  - Word for word, these scriptures would be memorized.
- Now by the end of Beit Talmud, at age fourteen or fifteen, they are working in the family business, apprenticing in the family trade with their parents.
  - But the best of the best would continue on in their education, to yet another level called Beit Midrash.
    - They would go to a rabbi and apply to that rabbi to become one of the rabbi's disciples.

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When we talk about a disciple, we usually mean a student or follower of the rabbi.

- But the term "disciple" means much, much more.
  - A disciple wants to be like the rabbi.
  - The disciple wants learn to do what the rabbi does.

But rabbis differed in how they interpreted the Torah and the rest of the scripture.

- One rabbi might say, "This is what it means to follow this verse or this command of GOD," and another rabbi might say, "No, I think it means this."
- A rabbi's set of interpretations was called his yoke.
  - So, when you went and applied to be a rabbi's disciple, what you wanted to do was take that rabbi's yoke upon you.
  - The disciple wanted to learn what the rabbi knows in order to do what the rabbi does in order to be like the rabbi.
- A student goes to the rabbi and says, "I want to become one of your disciples," and the rabbi questions him to find out if this kid can learn what I know and do what I do.
  - Can this kid carry my yoke?
- I think that's what JESUS was doing in the story of His parents losing HIM in Jerusalem and then finding Him talking with the rabbis.
- I think HE was being questioned before becoming a disciple of one of the rabbis.
  - This is why we don't hear anything about JESUS for eighteen years—because HE is off studying under a rabbi to become a rabbi HIMSELF.

Now those who didn't have what it took to be the rabbi's disciple would be sent home by the rabbi to learn the family business.

- Yet, if the rabbi thinks you've got it, if you could carry his yoke, the rabbi would say, "Come. Follow me."
    - And you would leave everything—your family, your friends, your village, everything—to follow and become a rabbi.
    - This is what it means to be a disciple.
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So, a rabbi might travel from town to town with his band of disciples following him.

- And by the end of the day, as you traveled these hot, dusty, dirty roads you've got whatever your rabbi stepped in all over your feet and all over the front of you.
  - In fact, a saying developed among the wise men and the sages, something they would say to a disciple:
    - "May you be covered with the dust of your rabbi."
  - People knew exactly what it meant to be covered with the dust of your rabbi.

Most rabbis started their teaching around the age of thirty.

- Thus, we have JESUS beginning to teach along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and HE comes across Peter and Andrew and James and John, and their fishermen.
  - And JESUS says to them, "Come. Follow me."
- Now, if they're fisherman, and JESUS calls them to be HIS disciples, they are not following another rabbi.
  - They didn't make the cut. They're in the family trade.
  - They aren't the best of the best.
- At once, though, they drop their nets and follow HIM.
  - You may have wondered how they could have done that.
- But understanding it in this context, it makes perfect sense.
  - Rabbis were the most honored, respected, and revered people anywhere.
  - Only the best of the best of the best got to be rabbis.

So, this RABBI comes down to the beach and says, "Come and follow me. I think you've got what it takes to do what I do. You can carry MY yoke and be like ME."

- Of course, they drop their nets and follow HIM.
- And JESUS puts together a school of disciples who are ordinary people.
  - They aren't the best of the best.
  - JESUS chooses them because HIS movement is for everybody—the junior varsity, the bench warmers, the B team, the not-good-enoughs—and through them HE changes the world.

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Back to the walking on water story.

- They're in the boat and the waves are crashing around them, and JESUS comes walking on the water to them, and Peter says, "If it is YOU, tell me to come to YOU."
- Why is this Peter's first response? Why is Peter's first reaction to say, "If it's YOU, tell me to come to YOU"?
- It's because he is a disciple and his whole life is oriented to doing what he sees his RABBI doing, learning to be like HIM.
- So, when he sees his RABBI walking on water, the first thing he wants to do is walk on the water too—to be like his RABBI.
- Peter gets out of the boat and starts to walk on the water.

But then Peter begins to sink.

- And he yells out, "JESUS, save me."
- So, JESUS immediately catches him, but then says to him, "You of little faith. Why did you doubt?"
- Peter isn't doubting JESUS, though.
- Peter isn't questioning who JESUS is.
- JESUS isn't sinking.
- Peter doubts himself.
- He loses faith that he can actually be like his RABBI.
- He forgets that JESUS wouldn't have called him if HE didn't think Peter could do it—that Peter and the others could be like HIM.
- JESUS even reminds them at one point by saying to them, "You didn't choose ME. I chose you."
- The RABBI doesn't choose you unless the RABBI thinks you can be like HIM.

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We always hear about the importance about having faith in GOD, faith in JESUS.

- Certainly, faith in GOD is important.
- But what about the faith GOD has in us?
- What about the faith that JESUS has that we can do it?

JESUS left HIS movement in the hands of the not-good-enoughs and says, "You go and make more disciples."

- JESUS believes that we can actually do it:
  - that we can carry HIS yoke,
  - that we can actually be the kind of people that GOD created us to be,
  - the kind of people who live like JESUS lived.
- JESUS believes that we can be the kind of people who take action because we are aware of all the opportunities around us for good and for justice and for mercy and for truth.
- JESUS has faith that you can follow HIM and be like HIM.

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*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all will know that you are MY disciples, if you love one another."*

May you come to believe in GOD.

- But may you come to see that GOD believes in you.

May you have faith in JESUS.

- But may you come to see that JESUS has faith that you can be like HIM:
  - a person of love and compassion and truth;
  - a person of forgiveness, and peace, and grace, and joy, and hope.

And may you be covered with the dust of your RABBI, JESUS.