

## BAREFOOT IN HIS PRESENCE

Revelation 21:1 – 4, 22 - 23

While at a conference in Florida early in January, I had a chance to visit a beach on Marco Island. I spent the morning gazing at the ocean, basking in the sun, blessed by a whispering breeze that dispersed the above average heat. I witnessed fish leaping out of the water against a cloudless sky, then the dolphin that was pursuing them. Perfect. Concluding my Sabbath time, I began the walk back to my rental car, across the sand and down a shaded pathway. As I reached the concrete sidewalk, I stopped to stamp the sand off my feet. I looked down at my shoes: my mother's flip flops, a fancy pair of nubuck "Fit Flops" my sister bought for her when medication caused her feet to swell. A wave of grief seared through me.

As she got older, Mom felt winter's chill more keenly, saying she felt cold from Thanksgiving till April. My sister and I had pondered whisking her away to the Florida warmth this winter. Observing her flip flops on my feet as I left the beach, my thought was "Only her shoes made it here." I kept walking, slowly, feeling the stuff of those shoes against the soles of my feet and across my insteps. I had first put them on the day after she died in July, in order to feel the constant touch of something she had touched.

A wise woman advised me to take some time out to think about what it means for my mother to be gone. Beyond the obvious pain of missing her on the other end of a phone call and the myriad other times I feel her absence, I did know what it means: she's with God. I truly felt it, fleetingly, while singing the hymns at her memorial service, but after that, just plain knew it again -- intellectually. Believed it -- dutifully. Not until that refreshing Friday in Florida, walking back from the beach wearing her shoes did I realize I knew it, I believed it, and *I rejoiced in it*. The seed of certainty had blossomed into a soul-swelling exultation that surrenders its hold on anything earthly and revels in the holy presence of God. It had soaked into my bones like the soothing Florida sun and permeated my being like the peace of the endless ebbing and flowing of the waves. My mother is basking in the light of the Lamb, and I'm okay with that. *Much more than okay*. My soul is filled with that same Light.

I continued my walk. When I reached the car, I knocked the last bits of sand from the flip flops. I paused for a moment, my mind lingering on this encouraging thought: "She doesn't need these shoes anymore, and neither do I." I laid them on the car floor and drove back to town barefoot.

Prayer: Ever present God, help us to release our hold on the things of this earth and be free to experience Your holy, loving presence. Amen.

*Marcia Van Oyen*