

ROMANS - BEAUTIFUL FEET
A SERMON BASED ON ROMANS 10:5-15
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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SUNDAY, AUGUST 18, 2019

I can't remember where I was when I overheard this conversation,
but nevertheless I remember it.

It was one of those,

'how did we get talking about this' conversations.

It was a conversation about feet.

There was reflection on the fact that feet were are funny looking,
weird, even ugly.

I overheard that from the bottom,

they are kind of cute,

the toes making little round circles at the end of the foot.

From the top though,

feet, especially toes, were described as looking quite odd.

None in the conversation,

who were willing to speak to the illustrious topic,

felt that feet were particularly beautiful.

I didn't dwell on it too long, and I didn't speak to the issue,

but it did cross my mind that

few people really like how their feet appear.

Whether it is because of odd shaped toes,

or bunions, callouses, too high an arch, flat feet, or foot odour,

we tend to be modest about our feet.

Few in number

are the people who will bring their feet out to be admired.

Bare feet are a swimming pool, camping,

end of the day when no one is looking kind of experience.

Beautiful isn't the adjective that we would typically attach to feet.

But today, Paul does it.

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

It doesn't take being an English major

to realize that in speaking of the beauty of the feet,

Paul isn't speaking about well proportioned,

pedicured, callous-free feet.

Beautiful feet are ‘I’m so glad you got here feet.’

The feet of the person driving the CAA truck

when you are at the side of the road are beautiful feet.

The feet of the ER nurse coming with pain meds

when you are in agony on the stretcher are beautiful feet.

The feet of the sniffer dog when you’ve been lost in the woods

are beautiful, paws.

The feet of the accountant coming with a return

when you missed them doing it yourself,

those are beautiful feet.

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

The apostle Paul had beautiful feet.

He was carrying good news.

In this passage in Romans this morning,

he was carrying good news to the Jewish people.

A large part of the book of Romans,

is Paul trying to explain God’s particular relationship

with his people Israel,

in light of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Paul had beautiful feet.

He carried good news.

‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

If you confess with your mouth,

Jesus is Lord,

and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,

you will be saved.”

Good news. Very good news.

Good news,

but almost too good. Too easy.

Too good to be true.

And you know,

if it seems too good to be true,

it probably is.

The Jewish people were used to working for God.

They worked at their faith.

They were keeping rules, following the Mosaic law,

striving to be righteous.

They took it very seriously.

Paul had said earlier,

that the Israelites were zealous for God.

They were working hard.

But Paul says their hard work wasn't based on knowledge.

They were working hard at the wrong thing.

William Barclay in his commentary on Romans,

points to an account that is in the Apocryphal book

Fourth Maccabees.

In it Eleazar the priest is brought before a tyrant of a ruler
named Antiochus.

Antiochus had ordered guards to seize each and every

Hebrew and compel them to eat pork,

and food sacrificed to idols.

In short, to break their religious law.

With Eleazar before him,

Antiochus said, 'Before I begin to torture you, old man,

I would advise you to save yourself by eating pork,

for I respect your age and your grey hairs.

It is good meat, provided by nature.

It seems senseless to me that you would hold out for this,

especially when your religion will excuse you

for acting under compulsion.

Eleazar said this to Antiochus.

'We, O Antiochus,

who have been persuaded to govern our lives by the divine law.

There is no compulsion more powerful,

than our obedience to the law.

Therefore we consider that we should not transgress it

in any respect.

To transgress the law in matters either small or great,

is of equal seriousness.

I will not transgress the sacred oaths of my ancestors concerning the

keeping of the law,

not even if you gouge out my eyes and burn my entrails.

Therefore get your torture wheels ready,

and fan the fire more aggressively.

My ancestors will receive me as pure.”

Eleazar was dragged out by the guards to be tortured.

He was whipped. His flesh was torn, blood ran down his back.

In physical weakness he fell to the ground,

whereupon a guard ran forward to kick him repeatedly.

He was made to stand again.

Even his torturers were amazed at Eleazar’s spirit.

They wanted to help him.

They brought meat disguised as pork to him.

Told him to eat it, it wasn’t pork,

but they would tell

Antiochus that it was,

he’d be free, without having eaten pork.

Eleazar refused.

The law was supreme over all.

At that point the torture continued, and he was burned.

Fourth Maccabees records his last words as,

“You know O God, that though I might have saved myself,
I am dying in burning torments for the sake of the law.”

For the sake of the law.

When Paul says they were zealous for God,

and zealous for the law, he meant it.

The law was worth dying for.

Paul quoted Moses in our Scripture today,

“The one who does these things will live by them.”

Sincere followers of God lived and died for the law.

In our context, while we wouldn't sign on to the Mosaic law
and while we would go back to the buffet for more bacon,

we do still carry the belief,

do good, do the right thing, follow the “do good” rules

follow the law and you'll be in good standing

with God.

Or at least, try your best and get credit for trying.

However Paul has challenged this approach to our relationship with God.

He said in chapter three of Romans,

there is no one righteous, not even one.

When he writes ‘no human being will be justified in God’s sight

by deeds prescribed by the law,’

No one is righteous, no one can keep the entirety of the law, no one.

This was huge stuff.

It means Eleazar’s conviction was misplaced.

It is the kind of thing

that would turn a law keeper’s world upside-down.

Paul went on to explain where righteousness could be found.

The righteousness of faith is what he calls it.

These are those confusing verses 6 and 7 we read today,

“The righteousness that is by faith says,

‘Don’t say in your heart, who will ascend to heaven?

Or who will descend to the deep?”

This could be resaid as,

Don’t try and figure out how you will get to Christ.

Don’t think you have to work your way to his presence.

The righteousness that is by faith says,

The word is near you.

The message concerning faith that we proclaim.

It is in your mouth.

It is in your heart.

Paul says to them, that is the word of faith we are proclaiming.

“The word is near you.

If you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord.’

if you believe in your heart

that God raised him from the dead,

you will be saved.”

You don’t need to climb to the heights.

You don’t need to dig to the depths.

You don’t need to enslave yourself to the law.

Believing in your heart is your justification,

trusting your heart into Jesus’ care

this is what brings you back into a proper relationship with God.

Confessing with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, you are saved.

That's it. Jesus does the work for us.

There are certain things I would never dream of doing myself,
at least not without a lot of training.

I wouldn't fix anything under the hood of my car.

I need someone else take care of that.

I don't try to fill my own cavities or do my own root canal.

I need someone else take care of that.

I don't try to fix my own furnace.

Natural gas, flames and I would not be a good combination.

I need someone else do that.

If the occasion ever came up,

I wouldn't do my own surgery.

I have trouble cutting watermelon,

never mind my own abdomen.

Something else I don't try to do myself,

I don't try to make myself righteous before God.

I can't pull it off.

I read a sermon in which the minister
had done a poll of his congregation.

He asked them,

‘when you die and you are standing at heaven’s gates,
when God asks you,

‘Why should I let you in?’

How are you going to answer him?’

The minister was surprised to learn

that despite his years of preaching otherwise,
most people said they would answer with,

“well, I’ve tried my best to be a good and decent person.

I helped my neighbour.

I went to church.

They answered with,

my good outweighed my bad.

I was nice. My motives and intentions were good.

And I feel bad about the things I did that were wrong.”

Eleazar would have said,

I died refusing to eat pork, in honour of your law.

The minister wrote,

“When I hear answers like that,
I imagine Paul standing just inside the gate,
repeating the words he writes often in his letters,
there is no one righteous,
not even one.”

There are some things I won't try to do myself.

Being righteous, and proving my goodness to God is one of them.

I have too much evidence proving the contrary.

We all do.

If you don't think so, you aren't looking hard enough.

So here's what you need when we stand at the gates.

Paul says the righteousness of faith is plain,

Believe and trust in your heart, Jesus rose from the dead.

Confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord.

The gospel of John 1:12 says,

But to all who received him,

who believed in his name,

He gave power to become children of God.

Receive, believe, become.

Receive, let him into your life, to be in charge there,

Believe, put your trust in Jesus.

Become a child of God.

When we stand at the gates of heaven,

we have only one way in,

because our own righteousness won't gain us admission.

We have to stand with Jesus, point to him

and tell God,

I'm with him.

Jesus holds your heaven Costco membership card.

You don't need to buy your own membership.

You just need to say, I'm with him.

It is freeloading.

It is riding Jesus' coattails.

The theological word for it is grace.

Amazing grace.

It is God taking care of us,

when we have done nothing to deserve it.

Righteousness is a gift of God.

We resist this with all our being.

It doesn't feel right.

If someone has us for dinner,

we should have them back.

If someone does me a favour,

I owe them a favour.

We feel the need to earn our way.

God offering us our salvation doesn't seem right to us.

We would rather earn it.

But you can't.

You need to ask for help.

You have to let Jesus be your ticket in,

asking him if you can ride with him.

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord,

will be saved.

It's good news.

However, Paul has a few questions of implication for the church.

Some questions that point to what comes next

when given this gift of righteousness.

They are questions that deal with sharing this gift.

How can others call on the one they have not believed in?

And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?

And how can they hear, unless someone tells them?

And how can someone tell them unless they are sent?

Unless they are sent.

Paul is calling us to also be people of beautiful feet.

We gather to worship.

But when we are finished worshipping,

we are sent.

We are sent to be witnesses.

We are sent with beautiful feet carrying good news.

We are sent to tell, so people can believe.

We are sent to tell, so people can believe and call on Jesus.

We are sent because

everyone who calls on the name of Jesus
will be saved.

Winnie was a woman who lived in rural east Africa.

Her feet were broad and flat.

To watch her walk brought images of

geese crossing a road to mind.

Her feet landed on the ground with a slap,

sending a little cloud of dust into the air.

On one particular day she was sitting in front of her home,

her leg crossed over her knee.

Her head bent down, caring for her feet.

Her home was more of a shack really,

a lean-to of corrugated metal, mud and cardboard.

In this place she cared for a family of six.

Her feet were a mess.

Broad and flat, they were covered in callouses.

The bottoms of her feet were so tough,
they felt like the soles of shoes.

Which was a good thing really,
because she had no shoes of her own.

Her left foot had a cut.

She had stepped on a sharp rock.

It left a nasty wound,
painful not only to the touch,
but painful to look at,
the kind of wound from which people avert their eyes.

As Winnie did her best to clean up her feet,

she quietly commented to herself,

“What ugly feet I have.

Tough, and dirty, and scarred.

Ugly, ugly feet.

Standing in the doorway behind her

her nine year old daughter overheard the comments.

Coming out from behind her mother,
she sat down cross legged in front of her,
and said to her,

‘Mother, you have the most beautiful feet in the world.’

Her mother looked at her tough, scarred and calloused feet,
and then at her daughter and asked,
‘what on earth are you talking about little one?’

Her daughter said it again,

they are the most beautiful feet in the world.

These are the feet that walk two miles out to the village every day,
and two miles back,

carrying water, and food to care for us, your family.

These are the feet that bring us life and that show us love.

They are beautiful feet mother.

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

You have had good news brought to you.

Somewhere on your journey,

a parent, a grandparent, a Sunday School teacher,

a youth leader, a camp counsellor, a friend, a minister, a spouse,

brought the good news of the gospel to you,

someone had feet that brought you life in Christ,

and showed you the unfailing love of God.

‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

You have beautiful feet too.

You have good news that you carry.

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?

Be the one who gives witness.

And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?

Be the one who tells them.

And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Be the one who proclaims.

And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?

Be the one who goes.

You received the righteousness of Christ.

Beautiful feet brought you good news.

Be the one who brings good news.

Be the one with beautiful feet.

Amen.