

TALKING WITH YOUR FEET

Pentecost 10 year A

Gn. 37:1-4, 12-28; Ps. 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b; Rom. 10:5-15; Mt. 14:22-33 Glad. 09/08/2020

A teenage boy kept begging his father to let him drive the car to school which was only three blocks away. Exasperated his father replied, "Drive to school? Why do you think God gave you two feet?" The boy answered, "One foot is to put on the brake. The other is to put on the accelerator."

One day a grandmother noticed something wrong her five year old granddaughter's feet and said: "Honey, you've got your shoes on the wrong feet."

The little girl looked down and then said: "But Grandma, these are the only feet I've got!"

Feet. We all have them. You've probably wanted someone to say, "Take a load off your feet" because you felt "Dead on your feet." I'll bet you've heard parents tell you to "Get the lead out of your feet" or quit "Dragging your feet" or it's time to "Stand on your own two feet."

And you've probably felt "ten-feet tall" and gone to "Jump in with both feet" but found you had "Feet of clay" and "Got cold feet" and been "Knocked off your feet" so you had to "Get back on your feet" while keeping "Both feet on the ground." (Do I get the prize for including the most number idioms in one sentence?)

But I'll bet no one has ever asked you. "Do You Have Beautiful Feet?" Certainly not the podiatrist.

Ok, keep your shoes on (see what I did there). I'm not going to have a contest, I don't want to embarrass anyone—but that's kind-a the topic for discussion this morning. "Do You Have Beautiful Feet?" and what does that actually mean. The clue to understanding what that question implies and how to answer it is found in our Scripture reading for this morning from Paul's letter to the Romans.

No doubt, you have at sometime heard that other common idiom: "Let your feet do the talking." This morning, I want to address the topic of talking with your feet.

So, let's take a closer look at our feet—metaphorically, please. Like I said, please keep your shoes on. (COVID-19 is one thing—a room full of naked feet is something else entirely.) The reality is that there are issues about our feet that go beyond the hammer toes and

bunions, the rough soles and the ingrown toenails. Perhaps it's time to see our feet from a different perspective—from God's perspective—through the lens of Paul—as tools of the messenger—as foundational to carrying the good news into all the earth. Perhaps it's time to take feet seriously for the role they play in our effort to be stewards of the gifts of God and the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Feet are quite fascinating, and here are a few foot facts to prove it. Did you know that 25 percent of all the bones in the human body are located in the feet? Have you heard that your feet mirror your general health, and conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, and circulatory disorders can show initial signs in the feet? Here's my favourite foot fact: in an average day the feet endure the cumulative force of several hundred tons. (And you thought that diet was helping.)

So, even though our feet are fairly lowly in stature, they're really pretty important—no matter what they look like—or smell like, for that matter. Feet keep us grounded. They support us. Our feet are made for locomotion, for walking, and they're ideal for getting us from place to place—and yes, they're great for operating the accelerator and brake pedals of our cars—and the clutch if you still have one. Feet are useful. Feet are functional. And feet are beautiful when they're used in service to God.

As you study the writings of the apostle Paul, you will discover that Paul's distinction between faith and works is not about two different ways in which humans might respond to God. Very often we get this idea that faith is good and that works are bad—as if these two aspects are diametrically opposed.

To Greek people, who made up the majority of those Paul was speaking to, spirit and matter were separate realms. The human person inhabited both realms—but the Greeks held that the identity of the person was spiritual in nature. So, they had no trouble in separating these two aspects of being—spirit and matter—faith and works. To them, it was the spiritual stuff that mattered, not religious behaviours. These behaviours were acted out in the physical world which was imperfect. Activity or “works” in the plane of matter, therefore, would also be imperfect, and hence inferior to the perfection to be obtained on the spiritual level. Trust in God would make you perfect (i.e. in a right relationship with the God). Such perfection would bring contemplative bliss and spiritual insight. Matter didn't matter, as it were.

And who wouldn't want to be able to spend the majority of your time in spiritual meditation and contemplation? To be "one" with God in the spiritual realm. But the Scriptures constantly tell us that this is not where we live most of the time.

Paul is not only concerned with the metaphysical aspects of salvation (i.e. faith) but also with the practical aspects of our faith (i.e. works). Works, for the Jews, were concerned with keeping the letter of the Law. For Paul, however, the works of the Law are replaced by the duty of faith in Jesus. For Christians, there are two components to faith—internal ascent (or faith) and "confession of the lips". And this confession of the lips involves more than just lip service, as it were—it involves action—this is the "works of faith".

The truth of the matter, therefore, is that both are necessary—faith *and* works. We also see this very clearly in the letter of James, when he writes:

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (James 2:14-16)

When Paul talks about "works" in the negative sense, he is specifically talking about doing the works of the Law—the Torah—actions that distinguish Israel as God's faithful people. "Faith", for Paul, has to do first and foremost with the faithfulness of Jesus Christ in his death—and then our response of trusting in Jesus as God's anointed Lord.

For Paul, faith is known by obedience (Romans 1:5; 16:26) and even work (1 Thess. 1:3). When he contrasts faith and works, his goal is not to get people to stop doing things, but to recognize that God has acted in and through Jesus Christ *and to act accordingly*—to work in concert with God and God's mission in the world. It is to act out our faith in practical ways. As James says a little later on from the previous quote: "*Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.*" (James 2:8b)

Paul reminds us that, through the Law, the Israelites sought to establish their own righteousness rather than being subject to God's righteousness (10:3). He then goes on to say that the goal of the Law was Christ, who is the source of this divine righteousness for all who believe (10:4).

The startling claim that Paul makes repeatedly through this section of the letter is that the purpose of the law is not to tell people what to do. Instead, its purpose is to refer people to Christ who was to come and has now arrived. This is precisely how Paul interprets scripture in Romans 10:5-10.

What Paul means then, is that we are to stop doing the works of the Law—that is, stop doing things with the attitude that the doing of them, somehow buys us salvation. It is faith that brings salvation—faith in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Our faith, however, must always be accompanied by works—not works of the Law—but works of forgiveness, compassion and sharing the gospel with those we meet. And this is where our feet come into play. You can't show compassion or share the gospel without moving your feet. There are no arm-chair evangelists—accept, of course, those who are old or infirmed, who spend their time in prayer because they are unable go out. But that's not most of us.

It also comes back to the question I was asking last week: How much do you care? Do you care enough about others, to get up on your feet and share the good news of the gospel with them?

Yes, the key to beautiful feet lies not in their physical form but in their use. Our feet should be active to the best of our ability. Use your feet to gather with your worshipping community to praise God and find strength for the discipleship journey. Use your feet to visit those who are sick, in prison, and new to your community. Use your feet to walk, jog, or other forms of exercise to be a good steward of your health and well-being. Use your feet to help others through trying times. Use your feet to talk to others of your love for God and one another.

Yes indeed, beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news! Be good stewards of your beautiful feet and use them well. Allow your faithful feet to carry you into service and mission in the name of Christ. And, you might like to contemplate these words from an African proverb: "When you pray, move your feet."

So, while you might let your fingers do the walking (for those that understand the reference), let your feet do the talking.

To God our saviour, be all glory, honour, praise and glory. Amen.