

SERMON – 9/8/26

Romans 10:5-15

"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news."
(Romans 10:15)

Picture the scene. The lookout is on the city wall keeping watch for the arrival of a messenger. The army has been away defending the people from the threat of invasion and the people are at home waiting for news of what has happened. Has there been a glorious triumph or has the army been defeated and have preparations to be made for the city to be defended from within? Either way, what news of any casualties? Then, on the horizon, there is sign of movement. It is a lone figure making their way steadily nearer. The dust is being churned up by the runner's feet. What is the news? How could the lookout possibly tell from a distance? Perhaps if the news was bad the messenger would be hesitant. Maybe if there was good news to share the messenger would be excited and the dust would be stirred more vigorously by flying feet. Or perhaps there would be an even greater urgency if there was a warning to be given that the city was about to face attack and a possible siege. Still, a skilled lookout would probably be able to tell: 'How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news!'

Incidentally there is an account in the Second Book of Samuel of a scene just like that. The armies of King David have been doing battle with the armies of his son Absalom and the king's troops have defeated the insurrectionists. David is sitting waiting for news and a watchman spots a man running alone. If he is alone, says David, he must have good news, and as it turns out he does indeed bear the good news of victory secured, but he also has to inform David that his rebellious son Absalom has been killed in the fray. Bitter sweet indeed.

Anyway, I wonder what kind of news people expect *us* to be bearing as Christians in the world today? When people see *us* coming their way, do they expect their hearts to be lifted by our message? I hope I am wrong in my perception but sometimes I think that Christians are regarded in our society more as being purveyors of gloom and bad news than of Gospel. In many ways

the Church in our time is more than a little down at heel, hesitant about standing up with *any* kind of message in the public arena never mind running with dust flying to tell the Good News about Jesus Christ. I think that anyone who had any contact with the Church in Kinross this past week would testify to the contrary but in reality that may be the exception that proves the rule.

Chapters 9 to 11 of Paul's Letter to the Romans deal with the place of the Jews in the purposes of God. The whole idea of a Chosen People is of course fraught with complexity and it would take much more time than we have this morning to dig into what theologians call the doctrine of election. Why did God choose Isaac over Ishmael? Why did the younger twin, Jacob, receive God's favour in place of his elder brother Esau? Why indeed did God choose the children of Israel at all, and having opened the way of salvation to the Gentiles, all nations, through Jesus' Great Commission that we were thinking about last Sunday, is He thereby rejecting Israel? We need to be very careful about terminology – Israel can be understood both as the family name of the physical descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and as a modern day nation-state; Jewishness can describe both an ethnic identity and a religious one and you can be one without being the other. There can be no room whatsoever for anti-semitism just as there can be no room for hatred of *any* person or people group and there is no excuse whatsoever for pride in your status as a citizen of one particular nation or group just as there can be no excuse for disparaging someone because they belong to a different community or ethnicity. For those of us who have a sense of being elected/chosen/called by God there must be no hint of superiority because God's choice comes not from unfairness but only from grace. If it comes down to being fair or just, *all* of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and every single one of us deserve the wages of sin, which is death.

In the passage we read this morning, Paul expresses his yearning for his brother and sister Israelites to be saved but he does so recognising that for all God's favour to Israel in the past – the adoption as children, the revelation of the divine glory, the covenants, the Law, the temple worship, the promises, the patriarchs and even the human ancestry of Jesus – there is only

one way of salvation, which is by faith in Jesus. Paul teaches that none of us can win God's favour by achieving a state of righteousness by our own efforts. Even the most righteous people still sin and consequently fall short of the glory of God so there is no way to find salvation through the things we do and the accomplishments we make.

It's actually much more straightforward than that, Paul says. "The word is near you," he says, quoting a verse from Deuteronomy. This is not something newfangled – it's there in the Law of Moses from thousands of years ago. "The word is near you; it's in your mouth and in your heart." (Rom.10:8) The Good News is disarmingly simple, so much so that people are quite likely to dismiss it and look for a harder way to find God. God's love is simply to be received.

There is something of that in the well-known parable of the Prodigal Son. Very often when we look at that famous story we focus all our attention on the younger son, on his waywardness and on his decision to return home to his father – and that is all well and good. But there are two other important characters in that story: the father (who arguably should be our primary focus given that he represents God) and the older son, the one who feels hard done by and whom we tend to ignore as we reflect on the story. In the context of what Paul is teaching in this section of Romans, the older son represents the Jews while the younger son represents the Gentiles. The Gentiles have wandered far from God the Creator because they have not had the benefits of the Law and the temple worship and the prophets; they have found themselves far from the spiritual home they have an innate longing for because of the image of God stamped upon each one. And yet God is all the while looking out for them, longing for them to find their way home and overjoyed to see them when they come. The Jews on the other hand have remained close at hand – they have worked hard to honour the Lord and it must stick in their throats to see the nations so warmly welcomed by the God whom they thought was a jealous God. But like the father in the parable, God is entirely even-handed - "My son, he says to the older boy, you are always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this

brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." (Luke 15:31-32)

The message is that in the love of God there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. In the purposes of God there is only one way of salvation. "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. For it is with your heart that you believe and are put right with God and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. *Anyone* who trusts in Him will never be put to shame... *Everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:9-13)

Isn't that too easy? This is certainly not just about the Jews; it's about people in general who think they have to earn their way to heaven. You may feel as if you are achieving something if you have to put your back into some hard work in order to coax a favourable smile out of the Lord. You may feel as if you are guaranteed a place at the top table if you are giving sacrificially to the work of the Gospel. But that is not what God is looking for from us, my friends – no, from Jew and Gentile alike God is looking for a simple faith: a simple acknowledgement that what Jesus did on the Cross He did for you and for me; a simple trust that in rising from the dead Christ has won the victory for us; a simple willingness to go and share that gracious message with others.

What do people think they are going to get from us as Christians if we approach them with the Good News? Condemnation for the ways they are failing to live up to God's standards? That would be hypocrisy because we all stand under the same condemnation. A requirement to come to church and perform a weekly ritual? Well, if that's what you think Christianity is all about, please think again. Asking for money or looking for volunteers? Maybe they are right to be fearful of being cornered by someone from the Church if that's what we end up talking about. Yet many of us put more effort into fundraising than evangelism; we think our efforts are only worthwhile if they result in more people in church on a Sunday; and worst of all the expectation is that the token Christian on the discussion panel is expected to be the one making judgemental noises.

Where are our beautiful feet? Where is the dust flying as we gallop to tell someone the transforming message of the Gospel? Here is good news for our time – for every time: you don't need to struggle to climb the heavenly staircase; you don't have to burden yourself with ritual or with guilt; you don't require money or status or power. In fact none of these things are of any account when it comes to standing before God. This is the Gospel, my friends – just come, Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, male or female, gay or straight, righteous or rogue, just come. Put your trust in Jesus who gave His broken body and His shed blood for you, who took your place in the grave and who rose again triumphantly for you, and you will know yourself to be enfolded in the arms of the loving Father and you can never be the same again. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. If that's you then go and tell that message to everyone you know and everyone you meet.

And may they say of each and all of us: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news."