

The Beautiful Feet of Faith
Romans 10:14-17
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“Beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” Paul’s says in this text in Romans quoting Isaiah. When one is writing a sermon on faith, one doesn’t necessarily want to be challenged in faith at the time. But that’s the state I found myself in this week...challenged to expand my understanding and experience of faith. As I sat in my office preparing this sermon on Thursday...my mind and heart kept going to Saturday’s/yesterday’s Presbytery meeting knowing that things in our denomination, Presbytery and Covenant would be different in two days and knowing I would want to respond faithfully to yesterday’s meeting no matter how the vote went...to approve for ordination as minister of word and sacrament an openly gay man or not. Questions about faith, whirled in my mind, what is faith, what is faith in community, and what does it mean if the feet that bring the good news aren’t so beautiful to us?

In Scripture there are at least four different meanings of “faith.” First, faith sometimes means loyalty or fidelity. Second, faith sometimes means belief: an intellectual acceptance of a fact as true although it is not a matter of knowledge in the ordinary sense. In the New Testament, “faith is defined as the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” For Paul, faith is the attitude or condition of perfect trust in God’s mercy or grace, a complete reliance on it, rather than our own effort or merit—for one’s salvation. From which the Reformed traditions take as one of our essential beliefs: “faith alone, by grace alone.” For Calvin, “faith is firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence to us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise of Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit. [Institutes 3.2.7]

But that revelation to our minds and the seal upon our hearts takes on different forms. One theologian has defined faith as “the deep human need for a unifying passion in the face of all objective uncertainty [W. Paul Jones] another simply says, faith is “letting God be God.” [Daniel Migliore] Throughout our lifetimes, we journey in faith, to discover and re-discover what faith is. From the youngest of ages, we teach our children the content of our faith...the rich Bible stories and at confirmation age we make sure the foundation has been laid, we review the content, so that then the questioning of faith can be done in an informed way. As adults, as we mature in Christ, our faith is deepened as our doubts challenge us and we listen for the good news in a variety of ways.

We listen for good news as individuals and as communities of faith. For example, yesterday, at the John Knox Presbytery meeting we listened for good news as a community of faith gathered in part to answer a question: should Covenant member Scott Anderson, an openly gay man be ordained for the ministry of word and sacrament. It is my impression that those on “both sides ~ for and against” presented sound, theological arguments scripturally based. Those on “both sides ~ for and against,” alluded to our larger society and the witness of the church. Those on “both sides ~ for and against,” were challenged to be a faithful community in spite of our differences. Those on “both sides ~ for and against” prayed together for wisdom and strength and guidance. Those on “both sides ~for and against” knew that some would be

overjoyed and others discouraged, just as I know that to be true when you hear the results today. When the vote was announce, 81 to 25, in favor 3-1, there was an audible silent recognition that our community of faith will continue to be challenged as together we hold this ongoing tension.

As your pastor, I knew that the same would be true for our Covenant community of faith...with about the same proportion as Presbytery. The revelation of good news to our minds and the seal of it upon our hearts take on different forms. I know that not all who call Covenant “home” think the same about things and I’m glad and grateful for that’s one thing that makes us a strong ~ and growing stronger ~ community of faith. When we hold the tensions of our different convictions respectfully remaining in community with others who differ from us, we all benefit! When we can hold tensions around issues our theological diversity thrives and blesses us, and in confidence we can truly welcome others to come join us...knowing they too will be respected. Those tensions include but are not limited to homosexuality, politics, the experience of God as Father or Mother or those who choose not to anthropomorphize God at all, interpretations of Scripture: some more literal or some more liberal. The holding of tensions, the grace to agree to disagree, the patience to listen with love, prevents us from becoming a homogeneous community; in the sense of a community of people who think and believe just like us. Sure, that would be easier but I believe it is in the holding of tensions like these that the mainline churches will regain strength and vitality of faithful witness. The holding of tensions challenges our faith to deepen, rooted and grounded in the love of God who is always faithful.

God is faithful. This is a profound and prevalent message throughout Scripture and throughout the testimony of the Church: God is faithful! Think about this tremendous truth for a minute: God is faithful. Think about all that that means. We may not be able to feel God’s presence, but God is faithful. We may not be able to understand why things happen, but God is faithful. We may not be able to grapple with the tough questions about God, about life, and come out with the answers we want or we think we need, but God is faithful. We may be angry at God; we may shake our fists and turn our backs on God, but God is faithful and calls us to be faithful!

This is the first Sunday of Lent...the time in the church year when we examine our faithfulness to God and seek to grow in new ways. In the text in Romans we read, “Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of God.” As Presbyterians we believe we are always reforming, and are to grow in new ways. We all know; change is not an easy thing! Beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news! Those “feet” have changed over the years. Jesus wasn’t what the Jews expected as the bearer of Good News, to them, his feet weren’t beautiful. And from Middle Eastern men, the disciples, sharing the Good News, to men of all nationalities...to women of all nationalities...to children of the world who at one time were to be seen and not heard, to other new voices, there have been unexpected beautiful feet carrying the good news of God’s faithfulness and encouraging us in our faithfulness to God; we may not think all these have beautiful feet...but we can grow in our faith as we listen to the good news they share. May God help us to do so...Amen.