

FONTHILL UNITED CHURCH – Scripture & Sermon
Sunday August 9, 2020 ~ 10th Sunday after Pentecost

WORSHIP FOCUS: “Feet”

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” - Isaiah 52:7

1st LESSON: Romans 10: 5-15 (NRSV)

Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.” But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say?

“The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart”

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, *“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

2nd LESSON: Matthew 14: 22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea.

But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”

He said, “Come.”

So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

REFLECTION: “Beautiful Feet”

When I was young, I took my feet for granted. I was a swimmer, so my frequent dunks in chlorinated water took care of any dirt that might have got caught under my toe nails. My feet were always clean. My feet were never sweaty or stinky. I had a special nail clipper for my toes, and I kind of liked using it. It was so easy to use! All I had to do was bend down. And, I liked listening to the satisfying ‘click,’ when I had successfully snapped off a bit of nail.

I was pretty happy with my feet. In the summer I liked to walk barefoot. Even in the forest. I liked to run. And I was dimly conscious that a lot of the enjoyment I got out of running was due to these miraculous feet of mine, which Mr. Douglas, our health teacher told us, had more bones in them than any other part of our bodies. They are an ‘engineering miracle,’ I remember him telling us.

And yet, the miraculous nature of my feet was pretty dimly present in my consciousness. Since my feet never hurt, and did what I wanted, I really did not think about them very much. My feet could take me to see my best friend. My feet could take me to school, and the library. My feet could take me to the corner store to buy Mojos and comic books. My feet could take me to the park. My feet could take me to church. And, if I really needed to, my feet could pedal my bike to my grandparents’ homes.

And then there were the older kids at school, the hippies. I admired them. They tried to wear their bell-bottomed hip huggers to class without any shoes. I thought that was great! “Lose your shoes,” I remember them saying, “It’s far out. Jesus never wore shoes. Peace.”

But lots of people did not think so.

In contrast to my neutral, positive feelings about my feet, there was a negative cultural narrative about feet that predominated. Teachers hissed at the hippies at school, “Put on your shoes!” Friends talked about toe jam, and stinky feet. Aunts equated bare feet with poor living conditions, poverty and ignorance. Men I overheard in the neighbourhood sometimes talked about women’s feet in a way that I knew God would think was not right. Grandparents complained about the arthritis in their feet. Parents of friends would come home from work and exclaim, “O my aching feet.” And I heard words that just plain scared me about feet – bunions, callouses, warts, plantar fasciitis. There were horrible stories that Mr. Douglas told us about diseases you could get from walking around barefoot. And then there was my mother – the feminist – ranting about high heels and how heels were an instrument of woman’s subjugation by men.

On the one hand there was my positive child’s view of feet, and, on the other hand, there was an adult view of feet, which was definitely not positive, or neutral, full of judgement.

Feet were to be hidden I found out. Bare feet were not appropriate for adults. You didn’t talk about feet in polite company. If there was a part of the body that was ugly, it was feet. And, as I aged myself, I came to understand this. For all the wonders of all the bones in our feet – in spite of being an engineering miracle – our feet are often one of the first parts of our body to tell us that we are wearing out. They hurt. Circulation can become a problem. Bending down easily to get those toe nails cut safely can become a significant medical procedure.

I came to understand that we are all a little like the statue in Daniel. Dress us up, and we appear to be glimmering gold and silver. But take off our clothes, and our feet are clay – crumbling and cracked – not a miracle – but a fatal flaw.

And yet – perhaps it is because of COVID19, and the more restricted life we are living today – when the distances we travel are becoming shorter, and we are all walking more, and sometimes even running or biking, I am remembering my childhood wonder and positive understanding of feet. They may not be perfect – but they can take us where we need to go. We don't need the Jimmy Choos or the red-healed Manolo Blaniks.

We have just what we need. Our feet. Our human God-given physical ability. Our feet may be imperfect, but they can get us where we need to go. For some of us in wheel chairs, or who need to use walkers or canes, our feet may no longer take us great distances. But if we remember that when we were young, our God-given feet never actually took us that far – really no further than our immediate neighbourhood, that is what I want us to think about and consider today. When we were children, the distance our feet could take us was enough. Our feet could take us where we needed to go, and, where we truly needed to go was not far. And yet, as children, the small journeys our feet could take us were a wonder, a source of joy and discovery just as powerful as the longer journeys we take as adults. What are the canals of Venice to an adult, for instance, compared to the explorations we made as children of the mysterious swamp at the bottom of the hollow? The small, local distances our feet took us as children were more than enough. In the very small extent we were able to travel, we sensed the immensity of creation in profound, and life-giving ways.

In Isaiah, chapter 52, the prophet writes: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’”

In Biblical times, the Good News was shared and delivered on foot. Distance was measured in feet, in steps. And the distances that messengers were able to travel in a day, or even in a year, were small. Messengers did not hop on a plane and travel to Florida, or Portugal or Brazil. The limit of the simple human body was enough. And, in most cases, the humble foot was enough to make that Good News possible.

Isaiah, and Paul, referring to Isaiah, in our scripture reading today, lift up the humble foot – dirty, dusty, sore from walking – and proclaim it as a thing of beauty, as the very thing that makes the miracle of Christ, the gospel, possible. In our scripture today the foot is not something to be ashamed of, but to be proud of.

Paul writes, “How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?”

Paul's response to this question is that our faith will be transmitted by humble human means, by humble human power – not by jets or trains, or buses or border crossing, but simply person to person, footed messenger by footed messenger. As it is written, “*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*”

Standing on our own two feet, we can ascend into heaven and bring Christ down, and, standing on our own two feet, we can even descend into the abyss to bring Christ up. With our own two feet, wherever we are, we can climb Jacob's Ladder.

In this time of COVID19, in this time of shrinking distances and an ever retracting area in which we feel safe travelling, the foot, and the distance our foot can take us, is becoming a new yardstick isn't it? And there is a part of us that distrusts the foot and the parochial, provincial

local yokel who has never been 30 kilometres from home. We don't want to be limited by our feet.

And yet, perhaps that smaller distance is enough for us. Perhaps the places – these smaller distances – are all the distance we need to keep smiling and happy and joyful, sharing the light and life and peace of Christ.

In our gospel reading today, the disciples are in a boat on the sea of Galilee, battered by the sea. They are nervous. They are anxious. They are like us, feeling trapped in a small safe area with a storm swirling around them. They want to be anywhere but where they are. Far away. And then they see Jesus walking on the water towards them, calming the sea. In our tradition, Jesus is not wearing shoes. He is barefoot. His feet are enough. His humble feet.

But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

He said, "Come."

So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

We are all a little bit like Peter, aren't we? We try to walk. We try to trust. But we quickly decide that our feet – our humble abilities in this time – are not adequate.

And yet, Jesus immediately reached out his hand to Peter, as I believe he does to us today, and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Christ's peace is near. It is no further than the human distance our feet can take us. No further than a heartbeat. In our little world, our shrinking world, with closed borders, and widespread fear of travel, Christ is never far away. We can always get to Christ. Our feet, our wheelchairs, our walkers, our canes, our hearts, can take us there.

Oh, how beautiful are our feet!