

Pastor T.C. Arnold
12th Sunday after Trinity
Romans 10:15
September 3rd, 2017

Paul says, *“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Good News.”* He’s speaking directly about pastors. But apparently Paul has never seen my feet. My feet are ugly, not beautiful. Of course, that is not what Paul is talking about. No, rather, when Paul shared these words in the Epistle text appointed for today to the church at Rome, he most likely had in mind what the prophet said in Isaiah 52. He says, *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”*”

From this we get the image of the Israelite running from captivity in Babylon into the Holy Land with a great announcement of freedom. His feet are covered with dust because of this long trek, yet still beautiful because of the message they bring. So comes the Gospel word with these beautiful feet, *“Go... disciple the nations...”* Speed up the herald... *“Teach them all things that I have commanded you.”* Beloved in the Lord, Pastors are to let their feet gather the dust of the earth while trekking to and from to deliver God’s grace. You see, dirty feet are beautiful feet. That’s what these words mean. And you likewise are to have dusty/dirty feet. Not the “dust of the air” that comes from standing still in one spot too long. No, your feet are to gather the dust of the ground while taking with you the precious message of the Gospel, the very promise of the forgiveness of sins given to you.

Ugly feet become beautiful feet when they get dirty and carry a beautiful message. Many of you know that Andrea and I just got back from Germany. We saw many of the Luther sights... where he was born, where he died, where he was ordained, and where he preached. And as I got to know better the life and times of Martin Luther. I saw a man who truly had beautiful ugly feet. His feet were beautiful not because he preached a new doctrine but because he preached “THE” doctrine that solely rests on the merits of Christ and not on the man who walks with dirty feet. *“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”* Luther suffered because he knew he was not good enough for God. Luther knew his feet were too dirty to preach any word that came from inside of him. Left to himself, Luther is misguided, fallen, unrighteous and condemned. So he relied not on himself. Only the Gospel makes feet beautiful. Not the man, not his work, not his wisdom... only the power of the Gospel.

It’s wonderful good news that God Himself makes ugly feet into beautiful feet. Not only the ugly feet of pastors but the ugly feet of church members as well. Our feet are ugly with sin. We are taught a doctrine of faithfulness... to the scriptures, to our families and to one another, but that doctrine falls on deaf ears and makes for dirty feet. We are taught and asked to live a life of “love thy neighbor” but selfishness rules the heart of the man who has dirty feet, and a different path that benefits our selfish hearts is the one we take. Christians, the same Christians here today, find ourselves slipping well past the mark Christ has set for us and others. That’s why it is so important to know that the Good News makes the feet of the Preacher, the Teacher, the elder, and church council member. The business man and the office worker, the handy man... the husband, the wife, the mother and the father beautiful. Our sins put our own miserable efforts to win the heart of God before God’s gracious work to receive us. And it is especially important to know that

in repentance there is forgiveness. So, beloved in the Lord. Repent! Repent of all that makes your feet dirty... that which takes you through the muck of sin on your own path rather than God's path for you. God reaches into your very life with the Good News and covers your sins the same as preachers who preach at this pulpit and others like it.

Many people are not aware that the Reformation came to Latvia about the same time it was beginning in Germany. Word travels fast and so do those who would spread the word that we are saved by grace through faith alone. In order to distinguish the new churches of the Reformation from those who remained loyal to Rome, the churches in Latvia put a rooster on the spire of the church. This rooster would act as a symbol for the call to repentance... a turning away from a doctrine that put man first and back to reliance on the work of Christ on the cross alone.

And, at the Dome Cathedral, the bishop's church in Riga, Latvia, there is a stained glass window that also brings the mind and heart of the believer toward what makes dirty feet truly clean. It's a stained glass window of a mother pelican and her young all around her. She has no food for them. There is a famine. So how does she feed them? She feeds them by tearing at her flesh and giving her own body for their substance. She looks such a mess after picking at her own flesh to feed her young. But her young are eating and they are fed and nourished.

A bloody mess was that pelican. A bloody mess is our Savior for you. Beloved, our feet could never be as ugly/dirty as our Savior's... that took a journey into the Jerusalem on Palm Sunday... with what seemed to be feet that were adorned and kept clean and beautiful on a beast of burden. But yet those feet got a bit ugly when he kicked over the tables of the money changers and tracked through the material left on the ground by those animals that were being bought and sold. They ascended to that upper room where He would wash the feet of His disciples, but yet we see that Jesus did not wash His own. Then, to the garden they go, the dirty garden, then the even uglier Palace of the High Priest, then on to all the ugliness and dirt before Pilate, all the ugliness to His scourging... and now those feet start to accumulate the blood from his back and from His head dripping down from that crown of thorns. Now those ugly/dirty feet must carry a cross on the way to Calvary. Now those feet climb that hill and are fastened to that dreaded tree. Ugly, dirty and bloody are those feet... for a reason... so that your feet will be clean.

You see and you know how feet are made beautiful. That's your feet. That's your life... that's His words when they are on the tip of your tongue for the sake of those you serve... and for you!! That's the work of Christ for your neighbor and your parish family. That's the Christian life that you are given to live. For you, beloved in the Lord. Not of your own accord. Luther preached that Christ-centered doctrine. And that doctrine for you is this... Jesus' dirty feet make yours beautiful.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.