

September's Devotional Study: How Sweet the Sound of Invitation

"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." —Romans 10:14-17

If you are new to Bethany you may not know that this text has produced my favorite personal ministry story. For the sake of those who are new I'll review it quickly here. This event, while true, did not occur here at Bethany! I came into my office one day and found a card on my desk. I opened the card and a \$100 bill came floating out; always a good start to the day. The hand written note inside was not a thank you, an appreciation, nor a gift, it was quite simply a criticism that read, "You do not have beautiful feet. Everyone knows that a pastor should wear black shoes. Please use this money to buy a pair." I had been wearing brown shoes; they were nice and expensive. Fortunately I had a pair of black ones in the closet that I broke out for several months and used the \$100 for something else. I was not offended that the author of the note disdained my "style." They would not be the first or the last. I wasn't wounded that they had chosen this method to inform me of their preference. I was however a wee bit distraught that they had so badly maimed the text and utterly failed to understand its meaning.

So, using a few of that notes incorrect assertions let's take a look at the meaning of this text.

Why are the feet of the messenger beautiful?

To answer that, we need to understand its original source. With those words Paul is quoting Isaiah 52:7. Isaiah wrote those words about messengers who were bringing news to the exiled Israelites about their pending release from captivity in Babylon. Paul uses Isaiah's words and the experience of the exiled community of Israel to define the joy and beauty that comes to those held in sin's bondage when they receive the freedom that comes through forgiveness in Christ. The messenger's feet are beautiful not because of what is on them. In fact, just imagine what a messenger's feet looked like in the days of Isaiah or Paul after traveling long distances with word from afar. The messenger's feet are beautiful because the word they bring, the message they carry. My note-giving friend had misunderstood the core of the text, i.e. they were looking in the wrong place for beauty. It isn't found in what the preacher wears but what the listener hears when it is Christ who is preached.

Of course, that wasn't the only improper application of the text. While the former point might have identified their greatest theological error, this one illustrates their greatest practical error.

What must a messenger do to deliver a message?

I'm sure you've come up with several answers. Those of you who said, "Go!" have focused on the one I am thinking about. Paul's text in Romans talks about going, "How can they preach unless they are **sent**?" While this text certainly has pastoral ministry implications, it isn't only about worship. In terms of the note and its sender and recipient, the text is as much about the "look" of their feet as it was the "look" of mine. So, what does this mean? In reverse order the above two points have textual application for us.

1. First, every one of us, whether or not our calling/vocation is preaching, is called to 'preach' Christ. Think of all the places your feet will go that mine will not, all the doorways they will pass through that I will never darken. Consider all the places that your feet will stand in which a called church worker will not. If Paul is only talking about professional church workers in this text, there are a lot of places that will not receive good news. **We bring the Sweet Sound of Invitation to believe and call on Christ when we bring the good news of freedom from sin's captivity through Christ's life, death and resurrection.**
2. Second, most people, brown shoe-wearing pastors included, at least on occasion ☺, begin the morning worrying about how we'll look for the day. Perhaps we would live out the text better if we would spend as much time focusing on how we'll sound during the day. **For wherever our feet take us we have the privilege to bring the Sweet Sound of an Invitation.**

—Pastor Kevin Kritzer