

Sermon for Sunday 13 August 2023

**Genesis 37: 1 – 4, 12 – 28; Romans 10: 5 – 15;
Matthew 14: 22 – 33**

Beautiful Feet

“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Romans 10: 15)

Travelled feet. Hot, sore, dusty feet that have walked many miles are certainly not likely to be literally beautiful. But they are beautiful because of what they make possible. The feet Paul is thinking about when he quotes those words from the prophet Isaiah are the feet of travelling evangelists and preachers like himself who announce the good news about Jesus to the world.

In Paul’s day the good news was much newer news. The New Testament had not yet been put together, although Paul’s own letters would be included in it, unbeknown to him. So people all over the world had literally to be told about Jesus. How he had lived and been put to death, his teaching and healing. His resurrection and

what it all meant. How the coming of Jesus had brought about a whole new chapter in God’s dealings with human beings.

Things have moved on a great deal since Paul was writing his letter to the Christians in Rome. But it is still our responsibility as Jesus’ disciples to bring the good news to others. I’m sure all advertisers know that personal recommendation is one of the most effective ways of “selling” anything. Hence all those celebrities assuring us that they use unlikely products!

I think we are, on the whole, good at welcoming people in St Michael’s. We are genuinely friendly. We are also very willing to serve our community, and especially those in need. But how good are we at sharing what we are about? Sharing the good news of our faith with others?

I think there are several reasons why we hesitate. And I include myself in this. The first is toe-curling embarrassment. We can think of so many ways of getting it horribly wrong. The sidesperson handing out the hymn books at the door with a cheery “I’m so and so. Do you know

Jesus?” Or any of us greeting a newcomer over coffee with “Are you saved?” We’re British – well, most of us are – and we just don’t talk like that. And we’re really scared of putting people off by saying the wrong thing. I’m going to park that for a moment and come back to it later.

Another reason why we hesitate is perhaps we’re not quite sure what the Good News is. We just can’t summarise our life of faith in a few words. Paul is very clear that the good news is Jesus. A person not a thing. As he put it in our second reading today. “...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” (Romans 10: 9). It’s that simple. God is much nearer than we think.

Jesus shows us what God is like in human form. His death on the Cross shows us the depth of God’s love for us and cancels out all of our wrongdoing – all of the ways we fall short of our own expectations – never mind God’s. His resurrection shows that He is God and gives us the assurance that when we die we shall also be

raised. The good news is NOT that if we come to church on Sunday and lead good lives we will somehow work our way to Heaven. The good news is not for ‘good’ people, but for people like ourselves, people who mess up all the time and get things wrong. The good news is that God has done it all for us. All we need to do is trust Jesus. Keep our eyes on Him.

Our Gospel reading today is a good illustration of what it can be like to live the Christian faith. Peter sees Jesus walking on the water. Because of his love for Jesus, he wants to get out of the boat and walk across the water to Him. He starts out, but soon stops focussing on Jesus. He becomes frightened again and starts to sink. Humanly speaking he knows he can’t do this. So Jesus has to reach out and catch him to stop him sinking.

The story reminds us of how so often we start out on something in faith, but then can’t sustain ourselves. It is very difficult to walk in faith and not constantly relapse into doing things in our own strength - because we like to think that we are independent and capable. But we need

constantly to depend on Jesus, as Peter discovered. The good news is that Jesus is always there, holding out his hand to rescue us when the waters seem to be closing over our head.

So – to go back to where I left off. How do we share all of that good news with other people? One way I think is to reflect on our own lives and how our faith has made a difference. This may particularly apply at times of change, difficulty or crisis. We all have stories to tell - probably not as dramatic as Peter's. But stories of times when our trust in Jesus has sustained us, kept us afloat, got us through. Stories about how our prayer changed things. The times when we knew Jesus was there and that made all the difference.

Perhaps we could set out – just begin to get our feet dusty by telling those stories to one another. What an encouragement that would be. And then we might feel bold enough to step out and begin telling our stories to all the people we know who have never heard what a difference it makes to have Jesus in our lives. People are generally much more interested than we think they will be.

“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Amen

Revd Diana Young