

August 9, 2020

Happy Feet

Shepherd's Grace Church

⁵Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." ⁶But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸But 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); ⁹because 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. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."

¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." ¹⁴But 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? ¹⁵And 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!" (Rom.10: 5-15)

²²Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." ²⁸Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." (Matt. 14: 22-33)

Words! They are pretty important aren't they...or are they? It was John Wesley who said, "do all you can for as many as you can for as long as you

can...and if necessary, use words!" I believe what Wesley was trying to say was that examples are not necessarily set with words. "Actions speak louder than words" is the old saying or put another way, people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care!

Words are important but we have to remember they are not the only thing that conveys our attitude and our care for one another. Our actions convey most clearly the truth of our heart. Our willingness to do and give and share is much easier seen than it is heard.

Just last week, I had the opportunity to be in Dallas with our grandson, James. Now, James turned two in June and he is just beginning to use words to describe his feelings and ask for the things he is wanting. His vocabulary is not large, but what he wants is expressed very clearly and quite frequently by using very few words.

James and I had the opportunity on Thursday and Friday to go for a five mile run. He actually rode in the stroller while I pushed. While we were running James kept looking at the street and he would say, carsie...carsie...carsie...carsie...truck...van...carsie...carsie. I think you get the idea. James likes cars and it takes about 45 minutes for a five mile run. I wonder if any of you know how many times a two year old can say carsie in 45 minutes. Let me save you the trouble of trying to imagine. It is a lot!

The only thing that saved me from going carsie crazy on those morning runs was that there was a point where we passed ducks. As we ran past the ducks, James would say, "Duck...duck...duck...duck...duck" as we ran past each and every duck. A two year old can say duck just about as many times on a run as he can say carsie!

Still, the privilege of getting to share 45 minutes of uninterrupted time with my grandson without his mom or grandma wanting time and attention with him was priceless! Words are important, but the context of the words and the way they are received goes far beyond the actual speaking of the words. I would not trade a single minute or a repetition of the word carsie with James for anything because it was our time.

James did not use fancy words to cause me to treasure my time with him. He barely used any words at all...in fact, the case could be made that he used no word or made up words, which some would argue do not count. Still, the intent of his action, the wanting me to listen to him and share and see what he was seeing were unmistakable.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, the Apostle tells us this morning that the word is never far from us; it is on our lips and in our hearts. John the evangelist would add to that saying, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." This is the same "Word" that was breathed into our hearts as the breath which gives us life.

You see, the word for "Word" in Hebrew is ruach. Ruach means word but it also means breath or spirit. When God created man, God breathed into the lifeless shell. Said differently, God shared God's spirit with the man. (In reality, the word spirit should be capitalized because it is God's Holy Spirit. Of all that God created in those six days, the human is the only one with whom God shared God's Spirit. That Spirit, that Word that was in the human from the beginning remains with us all and it is that Word that is always in our hearts and on our lips.

It is that word which allows us to profess our faith!

The law does not inspire us to profess that which we believe. God gave the law to the Hebrew people as a guide, as a means of understanding. In the law is found example after example of what to do and what not to do. It is specific and it is concrete. It is not rooted in philosophy but rather sociology!

I believe it was God's intent that the people transcend the law and interpret it for what it was intended to be. Within the law that was given by Moses to the people there are 613 commandments. The reality is these commandments are 613 different ways for God to say "I Love You." In order to come to this conclusion, a person has to walk with faith. As Paul says earlier in Romans, we believe in that which we cannot see. We aspire to that in which we hope.

The prophet Isaiah says it this way in Isaiah 43. I have paid a ransom for you. I have given people in exchange for you because you are precious in my sight, you are honored and adored and I Love You!" (Emphasis added) The word allows us to trust our faith, especially when we read that which precedes these words. "When you pass through fire and water, you will not be harmed!"

Our faith puts us in precarious positions and those positions transcend words. James, my grandson, seems to know this inherently. Out of faith he says, up Grandpa. Before he sees me rise, he believes I will get up. HE does not wonder who I am. He perceives the love I have for him and out of that love he asks.

Paul says it this way, "Who will ascend into heaven, that is to bring Christ down? Or who will descend into the depths, that is to raise Christ from the

dead.” Ours is not to bring Christ, ours is to love Christ. We do not need to elevate Christ. He is the Word that was from the beginning and who brought all things into being.

Neither do we need to raise Christ from the dead. God has already done that! We are witness to that reality and we are witness in our faith.

So...what then are we to do? I'm glad you asked, but before we come to that we must address the issue of who we are. We must address the issue of our own salvation. Remember as we gather today that the Word is never far from us. The Word is on our lips and in our hearts. The Word, that same Word was breathed into us by God Himself!

Who we are is living, breathing, human beings with the very breath that we draw coming from the first breath that gives us life! We are children of God! We can choose to ignore our inheritance, but we cannot choose to deny it. All of us are children of God! There is no longer slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, male or female, for all of us are one family in the Kingdom of Heaven!

As I said, we can ignore this but we cannot deny this. To affirm this, however we must claim it! Paul tells us how to do it! First, go all the way back to chapter one. There, the apostle tells us that all of us are sinners. Here's the problem with that. God cannot stand to be in the presence of sin; no matter how slight or how small. If we are all sinners how can we ever gain the Kingdom of heaven?

Remember in Luke's gospel where it says "with humans it is impossible, but now so with God. With God all things are possible!" So, how is it possible with God?

In Chapter 3 of Paul's letter to the Romans, we learn that while we can do nothing, we can receive God's precious gift. That gift is called Grace and it is, as the song says, amazing! Grace is more than forgiveness. It is total and complete exoneration! It is as if the sin never happened in God's eyes. It is given without hesitation and it is given fully but one common misconception we often have...it is not free! Grace is God's Riches At Christ's Expense!

We are sinners saved by Grace and there is truly no other way to achieve salvation than to receive this grace given by God. The grace we receive is the precious gift of atonement through Jesus Christ! Christ paid once and for all time for our sin and He paid wholly, fully, and completely. He took upon himself our sin and left us spotless and totally cleansed! As Paul said, we are all sinners and we are all saved by Grace.

This act of salvation takes place while we are yet sinners. Christ knows us before we are born (Jeremiah 1) and while we were still sinners, even before we were born and became sinners Christ died for us.

In Romans Chapter 6, we learn that we must die to our old selves in order to reflect this incredible gift. We celebrate this as baptism and in baptism, we put an end to our old, sinful lives. Most believe we do this symbolically but what if there is more to it than just a symbolic gesture. Paul says we die to our old selves and rise as new people washed and cleaned of our past and prepared to go forth as children of God.

You see, we do not have to wait for our inheritance until we are no longer a part of this world. Our baptism invites us to let God's work of grace poured out for us to begin immediately. Freed from sin by grace, we are no prepared to make the profession of faith that lets us become who we most completely called to be.

Recognizing who we are initially, and the incredible gift God has given to us by pouring out His Grace through the work of Christ on the cross, we receive our baptism and put away the things of our past lives. (We cannot help but put these things away when we recognize all Christ has done for us out of love!) Then, and only then are we fully ready to receive salvation.

Knowing the work of Christ in His life as well as His death, we can profess completely and with our lips that Jesus Christ is Lord! We can acknowledge that He is Lord in heaven and on earth! Paul tells us that the Word is continually on our lips and when we profess with our lips, we are speaking the Word!

It is this same word that proceeds forth and brings all things into being. Without the Word, not one thing comes into creation(John 1) but because of that Word that is on your lips as you profess Christ as Lord, the profession becomes a reality. Our faith, that which we cannot see, becomes visible to us in the recollection of all that Christ has done.

That faith becomes reality as we hear the story of Jesus coming to the disciples walking on water. It is a profound statement that Jesus comes in the midst of storms and high seas. That is, after all, when most of us are looking for him! When the seas of our lives are tossed and rough, we call out and the Lord appears because the Word is never far from us.

We make our profession with a faith that is now tested by our own need and our own absolute reliance on the Lord! We believe that Jesus Christ is Lord!

But, can we really believe that God has raised him from the dead? How can this be possible? Before the seeds of doubt creep in, remember what Jesus said to us in Luke. "With humans it is not possible, but with God, all things are possible!" So we ask the question, "Is it possible for God to raise Jesus from the dead?"

First, we have to recognize that Christ was completely dead after the crucifixion. I mean, it would have been an easy matter for God to simply wake Jesus from a sleep but that would not have solved God's sin problem. See, Jesus had to take all of sin with him and put all of our sin to death in order for us to once again be reconciled to God. Understanding that, we can be certain that Christ was completely dead.

Could God raise Him? Look back at Genesis 1. In the beginning, the earth was a formless, shapeless void. A void is a nothing. Out of nothing, God spoke and the word that proceeded from the mouth of God brought all things into creation. That same word is the Word that became flesh and walked among us. (John 1) If God could create out of nothing in the beginning, could God not create out of nothing in the face of death in Jesus?

The earth is a present reality. Upon that, we can certainly agree! If the earth now is, but once was not, we can also agree that the earth was created. It was created but out of what? It was created, as the Word tells us, out of nothing. If God could create the world out of nothing, then surely we can and must concede that God could raise Jesus from the dead.

No matter how we work it out, the conclusion is inescapable. God is capable of creating out of nothing. Death is nothing...non-existence. God is capable of raising Christ from the dead. Further, we know that on the morning of the resurrection, many people saw him. Mary and the women at the tomb; later on, the two who were on the road to Emmaus. During the course of the day, He appeared to all the disciples and many others as well. Not only was God capable, God did raise Jesus from the dead!

The reality of this is also clear and present. Our profession is complete! Will you make it with me? Make it with your lips. Jesus Christ is Lord! Make it with your heart. God has raised Him from the dead! We make it every time we share the Lord's Supper. Christ has died! Christ is Risen! Christ will come Again!

When we make this profession, we are saved. That is the promise! It is made to all...no one is excluded!

Several years ago, I was in my last year of seminary and serving a United Methodist Church. As a part of my work, I made pastoral visits. Some of you remember when I used to do that here. Unfortunately and temporarily, those visits in person have been postponed. I do however make many visits on the phone. It is different but so are many things about the lives we are living right now. I digress.

During one of my pastoral hospital visits to a member of my congregation, was hailed in the hall by a friend who is a nurse. She told me that a classmate of mine had seen me in the hall and was wondering if I might stop by her mother's room.

Curious and confident, I proceeded to the room number I was given. Outside the door stood a woman who I immediately recognized. She had been good friends of one of the girls I dated in school. She was a year younger than me and I had never gotten to know her well but I was acquainted.

I approached and could tell that she had been crying. When I asked her what was going on, she told me the doctors had told her that her mom was suffering and would likely die in the hospital. I offered words of comfort but you all know there are really no words at moments like those.

I listened as the woman continued to talk and she confided in me that she had known for some time that her mom was not well. She had begun to make her peace with that but her concern was of a different nature. She confided that she was not sure of her mother's salvation. She asked if I would be willing to talk to her.

I asked if they had a family pastor or someone who had a deeper relationship with her than I would but I was assured that there was no one else who could be turned to. I had never shared my faith with another person for such a purpose as this and that confidence I spoke of earlier was suddenly lacking. Still, it was not completely gone.

I nodded agreement and asked for a moment. In that moment, I withdrew to pray `I had always heard about moments like these, but the actions which came next were not the kinds of things they taught in seminary. I prayed for courage and wisdom beyond my own. I prayed for God's words beyond my own and I opened my eyes.

As I walked into the room, a tiny, frail looking woman stared after me. Her daughter made introductions and she recognized my last name. She said she had met my parents a time or two and that it was a pleasure to meet me. All in all, she was very polite.

After a time, her daughter excused herself and the woman and I were left alone to "talk." When we were alone, I confessed to the woman that there was some concern on the part of her daughter with regard to her relationship with the Lord.

The woman smiled weakly and a tear formed in her eye. As it began to roll slowly down her cheek, she told me that she had made many mistakes in her life. She confessed to a number of indiscretions and made the claim I have heard so many times since. "I just can't believe that God could forgive me for things such as these," she said.

That was the entrance God needed into the conversation. Over the next several days, I visited as the woman's health condition went up and down. I shared with her from Romans 1. We are all sinners. She argued and I shared the sins listed in the bible, many of which would make sailors blush. I shared some of my own shortcomings as well. All of us are sinners.

I shared with her that we are saved by grace. I explained the wonderful benefits of grace and the incredible cost! Slowly, we unpacked God's riches, his word that is on our lips and in our hearts and we talked of the price Christ paid for our sins.

We talked of her baptism. She was baptized as an infant so she did not remember and no one had ever explained to her that what she left behind in that moment was an old self. What was raised up to life was a new person in Christ and as I came to Romans 10, she was eager to make that profession of faith with me.

I have never forgotten that moment because at exactly the moment of her profession, her daughter walked into the room and listened. She then joined our confession and together we professed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior! The next day, we shared communion together and she was discharged a day or two later. I kept in touch with her for awhile but over time, she found a church home in the town where she lived.

I am convinced that her salvation was real but that is not the end of the story. The end of the story is the answer to your question; "So what do we do?"

The apostle reminds us that salvation is not for us alone. If we reach heaven having proclaimed Jesus as our Lord and Savior but have not born witness to God's grace in that claim, I believe God will have a few questions for us.

How can they believe in someone in whom they have never known. That tiny, frail woman in the hospital bed shared her story with others so they too could know Jesus.

How can they know someone of whom they have never heard? That same woman told the stories of Jesus and found a church in which to get involved and share.

And how can they hear if there is no one sent to proclaim. It is our job as those who have received this incredible grace to go and share. That is the good news! We get to share! We get to tell. We may even have to use words but we use them as John Wesley reminds us: "Do as much as you can for as long as you can and as well as you can and if necessary, use words!"

God invites us today to let our life speak to the goodness of God. Happy are the feet who bring the good news.

When Jesus walked on water in today's lesson, Peter saw him and said, "Lord ask me to join you." Peter wanted Jesus to know that he was willing to take great risk to follow him and share the good news with others. We learned that Peter was not yet ready to share the good news. He still had some things to learn about faith. We also learned one other thing about sharing faith. "If you are going to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat." You have to take risks to bring the good news!

James says, "Come Grandpa! Get up!" He says it out of faith. He does not yet know the risks he is taking but we do. To love is to risk...to risk everything! Out of love I Go! Amen!