

**These feet are made for walking**, to adapt a well-known if somewhat old-school lyric, is not a bad overarching theme for our Bible passages this morning. Feet walking are referenced in all our readings.

In our Genesis account, 17-year-old Joseph is sent out on foot to find his brothers, pasturing the family flock and to find out how they are doing.

In our Romans account, Paul finishes this passage with an adapted quote from Isaiah – “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’ to say: “how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

And then finally, in our Gospel reading, Jesus, who’s feet do what ours do – walk, transfigures the ordinary laws of nature by walking on the sea. Peter walks on water too, briefly until his faith fails him, he looks down, starts to sink and needs to be rescued by Jesus.

But back to the start and to the feet of Joseph leading him into an unknown future.

For me the fascination of the Hebrew Testament is the richness of its stories, accounts of very imperfect people, like us, actually drawing the narrative of God’s salvation story along. Who is driving the momentum. Is it being pushed from behind or pulled from the front. Most of the family relationships we read of are dysfunctional and that between Joseph and his brothers typifying them. Even before Joseph is sent off to find out how his brothers are, a hint is dropped that there is something bad about his brothers, as Joseph’s reports to his father: “and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father” although we are not told what that ‘bad report’ is. Is it there to alert us to their poor character? The statement without explanation is otherwise pointless.

It is tempting to see only the dark ways in which human relationships operate – wounding one another, focusing only on the wrongs and hurts visited from one generation to the next. But we would be wrong to simply do that because in Joseph’s cycle ultimately it is a story of redemption, mercy and reconciliation. Even in this episode, the one who is thrown into a pit is drawn out of it. In the end even his slavery will redeem and renew the very family that sold him into it.

Turning to our Romans reading, Paul, at the end of his continued wrestling with the difficulties the law presents, asserts that all that is needed is confession of faith and belief in the heart. The connection is made *inwards* and then *outwards*: lips to heart and heart to mouth. There is something very physical about faith that we often miss if we focus too much on the word. The ability to profess our faith is made through the physical action of speaking and we cannot but be moved within by what we proclaim.

Paul’s point then, as he goes on to say in verses 12-13, is that we are all the same and as such we all have the ability to profess faith. Thus, salvation is for everyone, Jew and gentile, and Paul remains passionately optimistic that precisely that will come about. Ultimately what matters, is not the law, but Christ. Again, part of the fabric of Paul’s argument is the theme of the freedom that faith in Jesus brings. While we may now take that assertion for granted, Paul’s reflections here present a radical argument.

In our Gospel story, we should not rush to find its message only in Jesus’ power as contrasted with Peter’s wavering faith. After all, Peter showed both faith and lack of faith and we are no different. Flitting between the worlds of grace and condemnation, faith and frailty, the very fact that, if for just a few moments, Peter’s feet were able to defy gravity and the laws of physics to find purchase on the restless waves is “filled with messages” of hope, of faith in what we shall one day become.

God has many messengers and many ways of bringing us “good news”. Paul was thinking of apostles and preachers like himself, travelling from place to place, on foot mainly, and telling the story of the resurrection and all that flows from it. Think of the Wesley brothers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century travelling the country to bring the ‘good news’ to ordinary people and to itinerant preachers across the centuries, that spreading of the Good News continues.

Being around Jesus was clearly never boring or mundane although all too frequently the perception today is just that. After a hard day’s teaching and feeding of 5000 people on the never-ending bits and pieces of a picnic, he retreats to a mountain to pray while his disciples take to their fishing boat to sail to the other side of the lake. By the time night has fallen, a wind that was against them had whipped up battering waves and they were struggling against it. Now in the early morning, Jesus approaches the boat by walking across the waves. Now, just pause for a moment and contemplate this sight – it must have been terrifying and, not surprisingly the disciples were just that, crying out in terror “it’s a ghost”.

Peter, proves to be a willing if, unreliable student, in attempting to walk towards Jesus and, while his faith is firm, so are his feet on the water. For Jesus, walking on water was not because of an arbitrary power over nature, but because love demanded it.

We don't know what the limits of Almighty love really are. However, we can see Matthew demonstrating that Jesus embodies divine creativity because he has creative mastery over nature, in the form of the wild, chaotic lake.

As we watch Jesus, we learn more about him and more about ourselves. Are we to resist or embrace the image of Jesus; are we embarrassed or encouraged by it? How comfortable are we with this Jesus? Paul's message for us is that we are to reconsider the ways in which we may take our faith for granted and as we confess our faith how does that confession work its way out in the physicality of our life and the way in which we lead it. Above all, what chance is there of us getting out of our boat and walking towards Jesus. Metaphorically at least, that is what we are called to do each day and like Peter, when our faith starts to fail us, we start to sink, become afraid, we can always cry out "Lord save me" knowing that Jesus will reach out his hand to catch us, to save us.

So to conclude: "O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the people". ...." Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually. Amen