“Better Than a Pedicure”

Romans 10: 1-15

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 I mentioned last week how Romans chapters 9-11 don’t seem to fit in with the rest of Paul’s letter. Paul sort of goes on a tangent for three chapters here. Yesterday at our Presbyterian Women’s cluster gathering, someone was introducing the Horizons Bible Study that everyone will be doing this year. It is on 2 Corinthians and much of it is trying to make sense of Paul. Our speaker yesterday mentioned how challenging Paul can be to read, because he can be rather verbose. I would say this is true about chapters 9-11. I think he could sum up what he says here in about half a chapter. But in the midst of all of this wordiness, he speaks many good truths.

 Here in chapter 10, Paul continues to speak on his concern for his Jewish people. It troubles his heart that so many people do not believe in Jesus after they’ve heard of him. But he’s even more concerned that many people simply aren’t hearing about him. Word of the Messiah has not gotten around to everyone and Paul worries that they’ll miss this important piece of God’s story.

Paul makes it very clear how Jesus Christ is the key point to the story of saving humanity. He tells his readers that the goal of the law, the whole point of the commandments given to Israel is Jesus. That the long story of God’s people is a story that is completed by Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God. The entire Old Testament points toward the Messiah, Jesus Christ. That story of the Israelites is left without an ending if Jesus isn’t included. And Jesus’ story doesn’t work without the story of the law. So he tells his readers how concerned he is. He’s worried that not enough people are hearing about Jesus. There’s a piece of the story that is missing for them.

 It reminds me of an activity I participated in during college. Before the semester started, I was at orientation for RAs, Residential Assistants in the dorms. We were doing some team building exercises and ended the day with a puzzle. Each of us was given a wooden piece and the picture of the end result was laid out on the table. It looked like an arch, about 10 inches tall. We, being brilliant college students, set to work on creating the arch. We knew we’d have to work together to make it happen. We tried to all squeeze in around the table and hold our individual pieces until the last piece was placed. We’d all let go and the whole thing would crash down. The pieces were curved, so we couldn’t simply place them on top of each other. We tried and failed, tried and failed.

Exasperated, we looked over at our director and noticed he had an amused look on his face. We also noticed our peer, Jenny, standing next to him, not participating in the activity. None of us had noticed that she wasn’t trying to help.

 We thought maybe Jenny just didn’t get a piece because there weren’t enough. Our director corrected us and said, “Oh, she has a piece. You guys just didn’t invite her to participate.”

 We were a bit dumbstruck. Then we realized Jenny was given information that we weren’t privy to. She held the keystone, which the arch would need in order to be built. The keystone is the top piece which keeps the arch from falling down. Before the activity, Jenny was told to wait on the side of the room and see if anyone notice she wasn’t participating, all the while holding the important piece that would complete our puzzle.

 We felt like idiots for not realizing we’d left her out. It was a good exercise in team building, reminding us that there are those on the outside who need to be brought in. In order to be a true team, everyone needs to be invited to participate. This was the point our director was trying to make.

 But as I reflect on that activity, I laugh at how easy it would have been if Jenny would have just told us about the keystone from the start. Sure, it would have ruined the point our director was trying to make. But we wouldn’t have struggled for so long to make our structure work without that remaining piece. We tried and failed many times to build the arch, thinking we would succeed. But we wouldn’t have any luck without that crucial keystone piece. The puzzle wouldn’t work without it.

 Jesus is like that keystone. Jesus is the missing piece of the Old Testament story that brings it to completion. He is the one who fulfills the law and brings righteousness to all who call upon the Lord. Without Jesus Christ, the story of the Old Testament would just be a bunch of scattered pieces. An incomplete story. A grand story, yes, but an incomplete one.

 As I think back to that activity in college, I remember being so happy when Jenny revealed the keystone and helped us finish the puzzle. We clapped and cheered, excited to have figured out how the make the puzzle work. We finally realized that we were missing a piece, but that our peer was able to bring the good news that she had the keystone.

 Now, I’m not sure I would have told Jenny that her feet were beautiful, that would have been awkward. But the Apostle Paul may have. He seems quite fond of this compliment. In his letter he quotes the prophet Isaiah, when he says “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.” Although this is an awkward compliment in our culture today, in Biblical times, it was a way of praising the person who delivered news of salvation. Of relief from suffering.

 Paul points out that people can’t know of Jesus unless they’ve been told about him, or shown who he is. Those who spread that word are the ones with beautiful feet.

 If we read between the lines, Paul is encouraging us all to strive for beautiful feet. We’re talking about something much better than a good pedicure. We’re talking about feet that have delivered the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who haven’t yet heard it.

 I know, the word “Evangelism” often makes us Presbyterians cringe. We’d much rather leave that up to the Mormons or the Jehovah’s Witness’. I’ve yet to participate in a church where there’s a waiting list of members wanting to be on the evangelism committee. It’s just not something that we’re comfortable with.

 But it is something that God calls us to do. We’ve all seen the mainline churches decrease in size over the past few decades. There are a lot of factors involved there, but one factor is our discomfort with evangelism. We shy away from it, forgetting that if we don’t tell others about our faith and the joy we get from being in community in the church, no one is going to know about it. They will be clueless, left in the dark. Much like my peers and I trying to build that arch without the keystone.

 The Apostle Paul asks, “How are they to believe in one whom they’ve not heard about? How are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? 15And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?”

 We are all sent to complete this task. Some of us with words. Some of us with actions. This doesn’t necessarily mean going door to door and telling others about Jesus. It doesn’t’ mean standing on a street corner and preaching at people.

St Francis of Assisi frequently wrote about preaching the Gospel through our actions. The things that we do every day that make a huge impact on others. His statements have been summarized with the quote “Proclaim the Gospel, when necessary use words.” Sometimes words are necessary, but most often it is our actions which show others who Christ is. How we treat our neighbors. How we act consistently between church and work and home. How we dedicate our resources. Our everyday actions reveal a lot about us, and hopefully we are being good representatives of Christ in the world.

 Another Francis, Pope Francis, was inspired by the Saint and selected his name in honor of him. The current Pope has been doing is fair share of shaking up the church with his actions. He swapped out the traditional Mercedez-Benz Pope-mobile for a more humble Ford Focus. The Pope didn’t feel a luxury car was appropriate for his role. He told women to go ahead and nurse their babies in church. If they are hungry, they should be fed, he told them. He has spoken on behalf of the marginalized many times. Speaking out for the poor and the outcast. In each of these ways, he is showing the world a pretty accurate image of Jesus Christ. The humble Messiah who was a man of the people. The pope is showing the world what it means to be loved by Jesus.

 When asked about evangelism, Pope Francis said it is a good thing so long as it doesn’t turn into proselytizing. By this he means, trying to convert people to your own religion. The Pope said, “We can inspire others through witness so that one grows together in communicating. But the worst thing of all is religious proselytism, which paralyses: [it’s that attitude of ] talking with you in order to persuade you,’ No. Each person dialogues, starting with his and her own identity. The church grows by attraction, not proselytizing.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

 Basically he is saying that actions speak louder than words. Building relationships is more important than gaining numbers in church membership.

 If we are to spread Christ’s love in the world, we must do it with an attitude of love. Genuine evangelism is an act of embodying Christ’s love and showing it to others. And it means taking the first step, not waiting for others to ask us about it.

 Back to that arch building activity – if Jenny had just informed us from the start that she had that missing piece, our trouble would have been prevented. We would have been saved from the frustration of building a structure when missing a piece.

 Same goes for sharing the Gospel of Jesus. If we tell others about him and show others Christ’s love, imagine the heartache and suffering that might be prevented. If we just take that first step and show others what it means to be loved by Jesus.

 Beautiful are the feet of those who tell others about Christ. Beautiful are the feet of those who live in a way that reflects Christ’s love. Beautiful are the feet of those who seek to show Christ’s love in all that they say and do.

 May we all strive for beautiful feet.

 Let us pray…

1. http://thehigherlearning.com/2014/07/31/the-pope-just-released-a-list-of-10-tips-for-becoming-a-happier-person-and-they-are-spot-on/#?1#?1#WebrootPlugIn#?1#?1#PhreshPhish#?1#?1#agtpwd [↑](#footnote-ref-1)