

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany; February 9, 2025

Romans 10:12-17

“Saved Sinners Make Beautiful Messengers”

So there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all, who gives generously to all who call on him. Yes, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

So then, how can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one about whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news of peace, who preach the gospel of good things!”

But not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who believed our message?” So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ.

In this congregation, there are quite a few people who know a thing or two about training – either because you’ve been through it, or you’ve put others through it, or both. And the kind of training I mean isn’t training for a spring sport or for a trade; it’s training for missions of life and death, missions that require the best of the best.

As we are in the season of Epiphany, it’s right to point out that the truth in front of us from Paul’s letter to the Romans is, legitimately, an epiphany from God. It’s the truth about how God spreads his Word, and how people come to faith in Jesus for salvation. Because, if God didn’t tell you differently, how might you assume God would do the work of spreading his Word? Well, if I were God, I would use angels. I would send the holy messengers I created, and send them out in all their bright glory, with all their calming “Fear not”s, with all their wit and charm. You want people’s attention? You want them to listen and believe and be saved? Send angels! Am I wrong, or does that make total sense?

So, here’s an epiphany we need to see. Because what makes sense to God doesn’t usually make sense to us. God’s ways of working don’t usually match the way we would go about things. So, he did actually use angels on Christmas night and Easter morning. But every day, to everyone? No. Whom does he call to do this? Sinners who have been saved by him. “He should have stuck with angels,” you say? Me too. But he’s God, and we’re not.

And we should let him change our minds on this, because in God’s plan where saved sinners proclaim his saving Word, those saved sinners do make beautiful messengers.

Now, back to training for something important. Have you ever begun a training process and had it dawn on you: I’m not smart enough for this. Or, I’m not strong enough for this. I’ll never even make it to the mission. Well, that’s the prophet Isaiah and the apostle Peter. Isaiah gets called into the Lord’s presence and thinks he’s doomed. And when St. Peter realizes the teacher he’s following is the divine Teacher, the Lord himself, he wants separation! Both of them say, “I don’t belong here.” Unqualified sinners, both of them.

And we have to notice that in neither case does the Lord correct them! He doesn’t tell Isaiah, “Oh, no, you’re good, come on into my presence.” Nor does God’s Son tell Peter, “Quit being so self-conscious.” And we should also notice how similar the words of Isaiah and Peter are to the words we speak following our opening hymn in our confession of sins. We are not being too hard on ourselves when we say those

words. They're completely true. What are we saying? "I don't belong here, in the presence of a holy God." And he is present here, as he promises to be wherever his Word is proclaimed. Jesus is here, as he promises to be wherever two or three are gathered together in his name. We are sinners who don't belong here.

There's holy God and we sinful people, and we are unqualified even to approach him! And coming into his presence makes us deserve to die. And if this sounds too harsh, please realize: God does not contradict what I just said anywhere in his Word. He does not argue with it. He agrees with it.

But here is another thing he says: the holiness he requires, the holiness sinners lack, is a gift he gives. In fact, it is a gift he gives gladly and emphatically. Here comes the purifying coal from the altar to cleanse Isaiah's lips. Here come the words of Jesus to Peter: "**Have no fear.**" Here comes his promise, through St. Paul, to you and me: **So there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all, who gives generously to all who call on him. Yes, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."** It doesn't matter what you've said wrong, thought wrong, or done wrong in the past. **Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.** If you are anyone, you are a member of everyone. To call on the Lord's name is to look to Jesus Christ in faith. Through faith in him God sees his righteousness over you, he sees your sins washed away by Jesus' holy blood, and you see an empty tomb that proves this true! And now God welcomes you into his presence. You are cleansed like Isaiah. Jesus says, "Have no fear," to you. You are sinner made holy by Christ and now perfectly qualified to stand in God's glory, here today and forever on high where we'll see it fully revealed.

Because you are qualified to come into his presence, you are also qualified to go out on his life and death mission. **So then, how can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one about whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent?** There are a lot of ways that you can take part in the mission of preaching the saving gospel. I'll start by comparing you to the ladies on Easter morning, who were told by the angel who preached the resurrection to go tell the disciples and Peter about it. These ladies were not called by a congregation or synod to travel around the world and preach, or to stand in a pulpit and preach. But they had the saving message of Christ, they knew people who needed to hear it, and they went. That's you: not a called missionary, not called to be pastor, but a Christian with a message that saves. That is your life and death mission. And please, save it all about how you can't because you don't know enough about the Bible, or you wouldn't know what to say. These are lame excuses from Christians who are losing sight of who they are in Christ. You know his gospel. By God's grace, you have believed it. **We believe, therefore we speak**, Paul writes in another place. And it is that simple. You are qualified to speak because God has given you faith in Jesus and made you worthy in him to stand in his glory. Because you are worthy to stand in his glory, you are also qualified to go and speak it.

And then there is also the issue of pastors and missionaries, those called by Christ's church to do this work as their vocation. There are more qualifications for that than just believing. There's a lot of training first, which is expensive and time-consuming and tiring. There are also all the qualifications that Paul gave to Timothy and Titus when they were choosing new missionaries and pastors. But we have to have these pastors and missionaries for ourselves, so we keep hearing the saving gospel, and for those who haven't heard it yet. The message doesn't come through osmosis or deduction; it has to be preached, heralded to them, in order for them to believe it.

So, if you know a boy or a young man or an older man looking for a change of career direction, who would make a good one...tell him so. You don't have to pressure anybody. You can just say, "You know, if you wanted to be a preacher (pastor or missionary), you'd be good at it." You can pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into the harvest field. You can also continue to give generous offerings, a good chunk of which goes to pay for their training. And you can keep the ones we've already got going. Keep praying for your current pastors and missionaries; keep being nice to them and supporting them.

Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news of peace, who preach the gospel of good things!" What makes proclaimers of God's Word worth their training and your support and your prayers, is not them so much as their message. If you consider someone's feet beautiful, especially in the ancient Mideast, it's not because of their feet but because of what their feet are bringing! The gospel of good things, or "good news of good things." What a beautiful and simple way to say it.

Sinners doomed and terrified of a holy God, are cleansed and made holy by calling on Jesus' name in faith. It is that message that makes us beautiful to God, and that makes all those who proclaim it beautiful, too. So speak it yourself, and do whatever you can to support full-time preachers, future and present.

Because not only is the message beautiful, it is also the power of God. **So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the Word of Christ.** God sends his message of grace through three channels: the Word, the water (which has the Word of Christ connected to it), and the Supper (which has the Word of Christ with it). So another way to look at it is: it's always the Word, the message of God's salvation in Christ. That Word presents God's salvation in Christ and it's also God's power to create the faith in the message.

It's our mission to proclaim it, every way we can. Stand in God's glory, holy for Jesus' sake. And then go out on the mission. Amen.