
The Beautiful Feet

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 9 August 2026

Romans 10:5-15 • Matthew 14:22-33



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Today's passage from the Letter to the Romans contains a phrase which always sticks in my head: "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart." It is a beautiful thought, taken from the book of Deuteronomy. Moses is speaking to the people of Israel, who are on the brink of entering the Holy Land, which God has prepared them to enter and take possession. It is Moses' farewell speech, for Moses himself did not enter the Holy Land; he was destined by God only to see it from the mountaintop. In a long speech, Moses reiterates the commands of God and exhorts the people to always follow their Creator. He reminds them that God has placed his law in their hearts, and that if they remain true to God, they should have no trouble in their new lives:

Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may

hear it and observe it?’ No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe. (Deut 30:11-14)

God is not challenging them with anything difficult: God has done all the hard work himself. But it is a serious thing which Moses presents them: “See,” he says, “I have set before you today life and prosperity [or] death and adversity” (30:15). As we know, the people of Israel did not always make good choices, turning away from God many times. Moses wanted to encourage the people to choose God and live in the abundance which God is always eager to provide for us. Many of the people listened; and many fell away from worshipping their God.

Yet the word was in their hearts! Paul was discussing how or why the Jews did not accept Christ as their Messiah and Saviour. Later in the chapter, he asks: have the Jews not heard? did they not understand? Yes, they have heard, at least. Ultimately, Paul argues that God kept the Jews from understanding that Jesus is the Messiah until the right time — right in God’s eyes, of course. That time would not come until the Gentiles had heard and accepted the word.

But back to our initial quote, “the word is very near you.” It is near to us as well. But God still counts on us to be the bringers of the Good News, because God wants us to be part of his plan to bring all his people back to him. “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” I expect this is an expression from Paul’s time. Most people travelled on foot in those days. The feet encounter the dirt and the mud, but every host was expected to bring a bowl of water to wash a guest’s feet. And so welcome guests would have clean feet, and their feet would be beautiful because they bring the one who brings there Good News.

God wants everyone to be saved; so does Paul, as God’s prophet. “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). Then, in a lovely chain of reasoning, Paul shows the mechanism of spreading the Gospel.

- In order to call on the name of the Lord, you must believe in the Lord.
- In order to believe in the Lord, you must have heard of the Lord.
- In order to hear of the Lord, someone must tell you about the Lord.
- In order to tell others about the Lord, you must be sent by the Lord to tell others.

And who sends us? Jesus Christ. That is the Great Commission. We must tell others, so they hear, and then (with God’s help) they believe. The word is in our hearts today. The word is more than near to us — it is inside us — and the word should be on our lips, the word of Christ and his salvation; so that others may share our joy.

But it seems as if there's a big gap between *hearing* and *believing*. I think of my own conversion. I had heard of God since I was very young. I don't think anyone could grow up and live, at least in the West, without hearing of God. But it is not just general hearing; it must be brought to you and told to you by someone you know, or someone you trust. So in my case, my late wife Melissa was the one with the beautiful feet. She wouldn't have said that — she didn't like her feet! But she was the one who truly brought the message to me, and started me on my faith journey. Simple hearing is not enough; you must hear the word from the one God has sent to you.

And then you must take it in, internalise it. The story of Jesus walking on the water is a good pairing with this Romans passage. I think of this Gospel reading less as Jesus walking on the water, and more as Peter trying to walk on the water. Poor Peter! He gave it a good try, but his faith, and his attention, wandered. He saw the big waves and started to doubt. I think, given the same situation, I'd be swimming too. As Christians, we all believe, and yet we let self-doubt and distraction divert us from that true, solid connection with Jesus. It is not unlike the seeds that fall among the weeds from our parable a few weeks ago. We let the worries and troubles of our lives distract us from our true calling, which is to follow Jesus at all times.

In the end, it is God who opens our hearts and God who brings us to repentance. It will not happen unless God wills it so. And so I pray to God to increase my faith, to close that gap between hearing and believing. Thanks be to God that I was brought to faith and to know Jesus — for I could not have done it myself. Amen.