

**Beautiful Feet**  
**Romans 10:11-17**  
**September 11, 2011**  
**René Rodgers Jensen**  
**First Christian Church**  
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*11 The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13 For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." 14 But 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? 15 And 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!"*

The Apostle Paul would be stunned to learn that in many mainline Protestant churches today the word "evangelist" is virtually a dirty word. Paul after all was the Energizer Bunny of evangelists. He spent his life ceaselessly traveling up and down the Mediterranean spreading the good news of Jesus Christ, starting churches almost everywhere he went.

In today's scripture, Paul passionately defends the urgency of his mission of to evangelize the Gentiles in a series of questions.

*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?*

*And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?*

Someone has to tell these unbelievers the good news of Jesus Christ, Paul says. At this point we might expect him to add something like, "It's a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it." But instead he exclaims, quoting the prophet Isaiah, "*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*"

To be an evangelist is the highest calling that Paul can imagine—it is a privilege and a joy despite the extraordinary hardships he faces in his ministry: beatings, imprisonment, dangerous journeys, shipwrecks, and, ultimately, death for the sake of the gospel. But for Paul, to be an evangelist for Jesus Christ is an honor and a joy. *“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

Yes, Paul would be stunned and saddened to learn that today evangelists and the work of evangelism are no longer held in high esteem in many churches—including perhaps our own.

So how did evangelist and evangelism get to be dirty words in the church? After all, evangelism, which comes from the Greek *eu angellion*, means “good news”, the kind of good news that will bring joy to those who hear it. When we do evangelism, when we are evangelists, we are simply sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others. We are telling them something that will give them joy, the same joy that the angels proclaimed at Jesus’ birth. In fact, the word angel comes from the same Greek word as evangelism. The angels were the first Christian evangelists, bringing the good news to shepherds in the fields above Bethlehem: “For behind, I bring you tidings of great joy.”

Whether we like it or not, whether we are comfortable with it or not, all of us who follow Christ are called to be evangelists, to be bringers of the good news of Jesus Christ, in our own way, in our own little corner of the world.

Which brings us back to our question of why evangelism has fallen into such disrepute in many of our churches, and certainly in the lives of many of us Christians? Part of it is that we may find ourselves repelled by those who most visibly pursue the

work of evangelism. Most of us have been confronted by Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons or others who are quite convinced that we are going to hell because we do not believe EXACTLY what they believe. Some of us have been offended by these folks, and the last thing we want to do is offend someone else in the same way.

The widely publicized scandals of pastors like Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart, and Ted Haggard have certainly given Christianity a black eye. Highly visible televangelists like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, who suggest that natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina, or the terrorist attacks of September 11, are God's judgment espouse a theology that many, both in and outside the church, find repugnant.

No wonder nearly 90% of young adults who do not attend church describe the church as judgmental. 79% of the unchurched believe that all the church is interested in is their money, and 84% think the church is full of hypocrites. 44% say that Christians get on their nerves!

Indeed, sociologists Michael Hout and Claude Fisher have noted a sharp rise in the percentage of those who claim no religious affiliation that parallels the increasing prominence of the religious right. People who are politically liberal and who are already on the fence about their faith see what is happening in the name of religion, and say, "This is what is being said in the name of Christianity and I don't believe that. I'm done with church."

But tempting as it is to blame our problems in the mainline church on the religious right, the truth is, we have only ourselves to blame. In many ways we have simply given up on the work of evangelism, the work of sharing the good news. After

World War II, during the 1950's, churches were full to overflowing as the GI generation married and started their families. There was no need to evangelize. People just showed up. The church got lazy.

Then in the 1960's, 1970's, and '80's, with the Civil Rights movement, the war in Viet Nam, the war on poverty, mainline churches became focused on the important work of social justice. It became common to assume that as a Christian you could be committed to social justice or you could be concerned about evangelism, but you couldn't do both. Pastors like my husband Rick who cared about social justice AND evangelism were viewed as a little odd. The church got arrogant.

But the church has finally figured out that you don't have to make a choice between evangelism and social justice. We've figured out that it's not the 1950's anymore and that people aren't going to beat a path to our church door. And most importantly, we've figured out that there are lots and lots of lost, hurting, hungering people right outside our doors. People that long for a relationship with something, someone, greater than themselves. Our calling is to tell them how we have experienced God's grace and love, and invite them to experience it for themselves.

But how do we do that? That's why we are doing this four week series on evangelism, so we can begin thinking about how to re-frame and re-imagine evangelism not as something those other Christians who sort of embarrass us do, but as a central task of the Christian life. Because evangelism really is just about telling the good news, and if we as Christians aren't in the good news business, we should just pack up and go home right now.

I once heard evangelism defined as one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. This who we are—we are beggars who here at this table have found a home and a family. We who were lost have found hope and forgiveness; we who are wounded and broken have found healing and wholeness; we who are arrogant and proud have found humility and compassion. We are all, every one of us, beggars who at this table have found the Bread of Life.

How can we NOT tell others this good news? If we dared to do it, it might look a little like this video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4dYT41vxxk&feature=email>