

The Good News always stays the same, but the news does change. There are things that were news to Paul and news to the congregations in Rome, to whom he wrote the epistle reading we just heard. They were big news to them, completely new, never heard of such a thing before in their lives and to us, it is as common as the sunrise. The idea that Jews and Gentiles could be together in the church is big news throughout the New Testament and big news as it is today was controversial. It is a problem. What do you mean they can be together?

There are things that are always news. The idea that anyone would be able to come near to God, to draw near, to call upon his name, to call him Father. Maybe for the first time in their lives. Maybe for the first time in a very long time. That's always good, and beautiful, and amazing news. Paul says that that is what the whole thing is about. That's what it's all been driving to. Romans 10, what you heard, is in the middle of a section where Paul is handling big, crazy things. Things that people have trouble understanding. How can God set his mind on me, a sinner and intend to bring me long before I was ever born, to bring me into his kingdom, that I could call him Father, that I could rely on him, that I could know that when I die, I will find an open heaven for me, a sinner?

That's news. After this chapter, he's going to look for more news, but about his own people. People whom he saw with his own eyes. It didn't make sense according to the scripture, they had the Bible, they'd had it for so long. How can they be falling away? I would guess that, that idea isn't news to us, we're well acquainted. But we do know that if they know the Bible, if they've been taught the Bible, if they went to Sunday School, and they went to Confirmation Class, the whole idea of that was that they should learn how to call upon God's name. You hear it said this way, and Paul is quoting the Old Testament. He says, "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek," not news to us, the same Lord is Lord of all bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For quote, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." That the Bible is there, and Paul is there, and preaching is there, and Zion is there, and St Peter is there, so that people can call on the name of the Lord and be saved.

There's no time limit on that. There's no time limit on hope. There's no time limit on the church's work. There's no time limit on preaching until the last day. You heard it in what Paul quoted at the beginning of that paragraph. He said, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." When he says shame, he doesn't mean I'm a little ashamed of the fact that, I haven't been to church in 17 years, or I'm a little ashamed that I don't know the Bible better than I do. I'm a little ashamed that I don't pray as much as I should. No, that's not how the Bible speaks about shame. Maybe you feel shame about something like that, or you've made someone else feel shame about something like that. But that's not what Jesus means. When he's speaking of shame, he speaking about the last day. The day when he returns in great power and glory, and everyone will know it. You'll be able to see the son of man returning.

Then will you be someone who loves to see that, or will you be ashamed at that time? When we're talking about the gospel, we're not talking about something that the world knows or understands right now, we're talking about the ultimate long-term investment in the only thing that will endure. The word of the Lord endures forever, nothing else. So in that day, and at that time, will you be put to shame and say, I didn't know Jesus mattered this much, I didn't know it was this important, I didn't understand? Shame, dismay, weeping and gnashing of teeth in that day, for those who do not call upon him. Those are the stakes. That's really how high they are. That's how much it matters.

But there's more, there's news of something that gives us hope. Listen to this, "How are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they

have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" When you think about, what if this person or that person, that I can think of right now should be put to shame? Maybe it's my sister, maybe it's my child, maybe it's the person I've been working with for the past 20 years. When I think of that person who is very near to me, what do I do? What can I do? What about all these people that I see every day that have no faith in Christ? What about that? What do I do? Paul doesn't want you to leave that as a question. He doesn't want you to leave that as, "Boy, this makes me feel bad. This makes me sad when I think about that possibility." Don't let it sit there. Don't let the Bible and everything that you know about it and are learning about it sit somewhere on a shelf.

Because knowing these things did not drive Paul to despair or sadness, he didn't think, "Man, what's going to happen to this person, and that person, and this other person?" You learned the message of scripture, and on the way to Damascus, he learned how all that scripture hung together and made sense because Jesus is Lord. Jesus, who was crucified only for sinners, and risen from the dead for our justification. Jesus, that Jesus, with the prints in his hands, and his feet, and his side. That Jesus who loves sinners, who loves that person that you've worked with for 20 years, and loves your sister, who hasn't been back to church in a very long time, that Jesus is Lord.

He knew that. He knew it wasn't something that he could let sit on a shelf. Now, Paul did not know how that was going to work out. Either when Jesus called him, or when he was writing to the Romans, or when he was about to die and wrote Second Timothy to his beloved child, Timothy. He didn't know how it was going to work. He just had marching orders. We're no different. We don't know who's going to occupy which pews, when. We don't know how it's all going to happen. We don't know how the word is finally going to connect with somebody in his life. We don't know and we don't have to, we have God's word, and that's all that we need.

But someone has to say it, someone has to deliver it. It could be the pastor, but the pastor hasn't worked with that person for 20 years. It could be the pastor, I know he prays for those things, but he doesn't know your sister as well as you do. Because the scripture is not given only for us to know, but also for us to speak and to act. That is why and not because it's a commentary on any prophet, or apostle, or minister's foot hygiene. That is why Isaiah says, and Paul repeats, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news." It's not a statement about the beauty of the messenger, or how well you said it, or whether you said everything you thought you were going to say, or whether you were able to make yourself perfectly clearly understood. I teach for a living, that almost never happens. The beauty is not in the messenger, but in the message. The beauty is not in the one who proclaims, but in what is proclaimed. Because what could be more beautiful than the gospel?

Christmas is coming soon, some of you are thinking of that, and some of you will take until December 21st to think of that, but it's coming. When it comes, understand that there's nothing more beautiful you could give somebody than the gospel message. Because it reaches them on a level, the Christmas gifts, even if they keep them, and nothing gets returned to the store can never reach. It gives you something that they can hold onto in the day when Christ returns. It gives them something that when Christ calls them from their grave will still be a gift. It gives them something for which they can be eternally grateful to Christ and to the one who I gave it to them.

Maybe you've already given that gift, maybe we're talking about your children and you teach them Bible stories, and you pray with them before bedtime. Maybe you gave that gift a long time ago, and you feel like the person doesn't really appreciate the gift anymore. Certainly is not

enjoying all that that gift truly means to a human soul, keep giving. I want to courage you today, not to grow weary in doing good. You do not know what you are sowing or what the harvest will be. Nobody does, not me, not him, nobody. You have no idea how much that gift is going to mean to the soul that you sewed it into. You have no concept, nobody does.

But there is nothing more beautiful. Because what you're saying, when you say the gospel to somebody, whether the person has been out of church for a long time or never was there, or whether you sit next to that person every Sunday, the gospel comes to that person and says, "Whatever else you are, you are someone whom God has made, and for whom God has died. The eternal God, the judge of the heavens and the earth, who made the heavens and the earth loves you so much that he was willing to die for you, so that you should not have to be away from Him forever, ashamed, weeping, gnashing your teeth. He loves you so much that He wants to give you heaven and earth remade, reborn, renewed, sinless, beautiful, perfect, and pure. That's what he has for you, come and get it. That's what he has given to you, it's yours."

Is there anything more beautiful than that? Is there anything that I could imagine that a life could mean or be summed up in other than, he trusted in Jesus and Jesus, never disappoints? Is there anything else that I could ever give anybody that would be better than that? How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news. But Paul is not unrealistic, he knows how it is with people. If you go home today and you read Romans chapter 11, you're going to hear his anguish. You're going to hear him talking, not about people he doesn't know. He's never been to Rome in fact, when he wrote the letter. But about people he knows very well, his own people, his own kind of people. People that have the same kind of last names that he does, and the same set of social customs, and who eat the same food, and have the same holidays, his own people. In this specific case, it's the Jews.

When he thinks about them, his daily experience is a lot like a lot of our own. Because there are people that believe that are far off, and it's even easy to have mission festivals for those folks, because I can send money and send someone else there to Africa, or India, or wherever I imagine is far away, New York City, and I can have someone else preach to them, it's much harder with my own. It's so hard, they don't listen to me. You can see in the book of Acts when Paul goes to his own, and he goes into the synagogue, and his own people say, "You're crazy. What's gotten into you? What's wrong with you.? You're crazy." His own people who should know better rejected.

His own people, the people that are raised in the Lutheran Church, and went to the Confirmation Class, and went to the Sunday School, and maybe even got an award for perfect attendance in the Sunday School in 1983. Those are the very people that aren't listening to the gospel message. How much anguish do we have? But what does it say? For the scripture is not just here as marching orders, it's also here. Read Romans 15.4, for your comfort. Listen to this, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel for Isaiah says," hundreds of years before Paul even, Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" Isaiah asked the question, "My numbers are horrible. I preach, and I preach, and I preach, and they don't listen. Who has believed?" But it's very simple. Listen to Paul, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." I might not know exactly what to say. I might not know how to say it. I might not know how to broach the subject. I might not know how to bring it up when we're all together at Thanksgiving, but I know Christ. I might not know how to fix this relationship or how to talk about it in the break room, but I know Christ. I know that he has prints in his hands forever that show how much he loves this person I've been thinking about. He let Thomas put his finger into his side to show him how much he loves this person that I work with. When he came to his

disciples who were uncertain of the future and worried about what would happen, and didn't know how to go about saying what they needed to say, for fear of their very own people. John 20, for fear of the Jews. At that time, Jesus came to them and said to them, as I say to you this morning, peace be with you. His blessing is upon you, his disciples. You don't know how the gospel is going to go out into all the places here about, and you don't know how it's going to go to your sister or your coworker, but it needs to go, and you know, Christ. Christ's will is not that anyone should perish. God does not desire the death of a sinner. He does not desire it, it's not what he wants. It's not what he intends. That's why the gospel must go out. Listen to this and take comfort, the scripture says everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame, everyone. You think of that person, maybe you've been thinking of. You think of that sister, or that coworker, whoever it is that you've been thinking of as I've been saying these things, you think of that person, and you tell me where the exception is in the word, everyone that would be for that person.

I don't see it. I don't see even the worst people that I can think of, and the most hardened sinners. I don't see the most unlikely people that I can think of that I'm related to, that would be an exception to everyone. The only thing I see is that they need to believe. I know this, that faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes from the word of Christ. So preach the gospel, let it go to every creature, to your sister and your coworker and everybody else. Why don't you do it before Christmas? Make it an early Christmas gift. Let the gospel go through the whole creation. Let all the creation hear that Jesus is Lord, risen from the dead and reigning forever for the good of his people. Let them hear that Jesus loves them utterly. Let them hear that what they thought was the center of their life doesn't matter that much, because Jesus needs to be the center. Let them hear his mighty deeds and his glories. Let them hear that he has forgiven all their sins. To Him is all glory in heaven and on earth from Jew and from Gentile, from the person sitting here today, to the person who needs to sit here and isn't here yet. All glory in heaven and on earth is Jesus'. Now and forever. Amen.