

**8 Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 14 – Year A – August 10, 2011 - Homily**  
**Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28; Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33**  
**Susan E. Wilmot**

It was mid-December, a few years ago now. I was one of the outreach ministry co-chairs at another church, and we'd collected a lot of gifts on behalf of our Angel Tree ministry. A few of us were delivering the gifts, and I remember heading out for one of the low income housing projects in town. On the outside, the building looked really nice. The town had done a great job of refinishing and repainting the trim. But on the inside, the building really showed its age. No new paint here, the walls and apartment doors were dark, dirty, and covered in graffiti. There's something a scary about large apartment buildings, especially when the interior lighting is not so good. I headed upstairs anyway, loaded down with the gifts for a little girl whose dad was in prison. The apartment itself was also pretty run down, well-worn lino on the floor, and scruffy décor. It was sad to see the difference between the newly renovated exterior of the building and grubby interior. Nonetheless, I was welcomed as a kind of angel, a messenger bringing good news for this little girl. She had clearly been told to wait for me in the kitchen, while an odd assortment of adults watched TV and drank beer in the living room. I thanked the caregiver for letting me bring the gifts on behalf of her imprisoned dad, then I talked with the child for a while, before leaving.

“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” I don't know how beautiful I felt that day. I only know that it was hard to see this little girl, so young and vulnerable in the midst of a bunch of rough looking men, in the care of a woman who wasn't her mom. Since we'd committed to share Christ's love through Angel Tree, at least for a moment in time, everyone in that apartment got a glimpse of the face of Christ in the world. Paul's letter to the church in Rome seeks to clarify and encourage all of us in our mission to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The word evangelism shares a common root with the word angel, and both are connected with the bringing of divine messages. Christian evangelism, which is about sharing what we know and believe about Jesus Christ, has become a rather dirty word. Too often, we associate evangelism with pushy bright-eyed fundamentalists whose first question is something like, “Are you saved?” Sometimes we're cynical of the sullied reputations of some televangelists who ask for money with promises of blessings, preach one thing, and then proceed to live their own lives without integrity. Since no one wants to be labeled as pushy, or lacking integrity, and since we don't want to be politically incorrect in somehow judged intolerant, we tend to rationalize away the call to evangelism without truly understanding what is being asked of us.

The truth is that as disciples of Jesus, evangelism is required. However, we need to be clear about what is expected of us. There's a kind of tension between those who believe we can share the Good News in deeds alone, and those who believe that we must share our faith in words. As is often the case, sharing our experience of Jesus is actually achieved both in word and in action. Make no mistake, faith changes everything. Faith is literally embodied, and lived out through the physical reality of our lives. There's an interior element and an exterior element to faith. As Paul says, we believe in our hearts that God has raised Jesus from the dead, and in faith, we confess with our lips that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. We also respond to God's gift of faith by what we do, especially with our God-given resources. Belief, confession of faith, and responding to God in gratitude means that we already participate and share in resurrection life now. Our belief, confession of faith, and response begin and end in Jesus Christ. From this foundation, we live lives

of faith and discipleship. Paul urges us to a life of interior *and* exterior integrity. We cannot live with integrity if we are like a building that looks spiffy and tidy on the outside, and yet have hearts that are far from God, filled with anger or hate, or weighed down by the cares of the world. This is one of the biggest issues Jesus addresses with the Pharisees. Here's how He puts it in the Gospel of Luke (11:39-40), “Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?” I think the point about integrity is pretty clear. The face we present to the world must be who we are when we're alone with God. A life of discipleship is a fully embodied reality, body, mind and soul. Our lives as disciples of Jesus are most of all authentic in terms of focus and purpose. Jesus calls us to live with hope, honesty and humility. Above all else, we strive to love and serve God and our neighbors. In other words, we “walk the talk”.

How then does an authentic and faithful life as a disciple of Jesus translate to having the beautiful feet of a messenger who brings Good News? Some have clearly misunderstood the purpose of evangelism, of sharing about Jesus. Some have abused the privilege by desperately trying to save the world, when in fact Jesus has already done that. Paul tells us there is no distance between God and humanity any longer. “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart”. The incarnation of Jesus, the Word made flesh, closed that gap, once, for all. Jesus has fulfilled at least one purpose of the Law, which is to unite or reconcile us with God, and with one another in our common humanity. Jesus has already saved the world, so there is nothing we can say or do to save ourselves, or others. Jesus is already present. Wherever we may go, or whatever we may do, Jesus has gone before us to prepare the way. Jesus' call to evangelism is not about converting others to a set of doctrines, a certain style of worship, or to some personal agenda. To be an evangelist is to introduce Jesus to others by being who we are – that is the face, hands, feet, the Body of Christ in the world. To be an evangelist all we have to do is to talk naturally about what gives us hope, passion and purpose in our lives, including what Jesus means to us. Being an evangelist flows from our experience with Jesus, and requires that we live what we believe with integrity.

This kind of evangelism is not pushy or offensive. It leaves room for the Holy Spirit to do His work. This form of evangelism naturally frames the Good News of Jesus in the context of relationships, making the Good News easy for others to hear, see, and understood by how we live our lives. In Christ, we are whole, and becoming more and more holy, as we're transformed from the inside out, and from the outside in. You are beautiful in God's eyes. We are all beautiful messengers of God's love and grace through our relationship with Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Amen.