

"The Messenger's Beautiful Feet"
December 29, 2019

Isaiah 52: 7-10

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Call to Worship

God's beloved people, come together to hear the story of peace.

For a child has been born for us; a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Come together to hear the story of good news.

But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.

Come together to hear the announcement of salvation.

For to you is born this day in the city of David a savior who is the Messiah, the Lord.

Come together to praise God for the gift of the incarnation, God in the flesh.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Prayer of Invocation

O Light of the World, be among your people today. Illumine our lives. Enlighten our minds. Make radiant our witness to your saving deeds. May your light within us serve as a beacon to those who search for you. Brighten our darkness today. Amen.

The Word Isaiah 52:7-10

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of a messenger

**who proclaims peace,
who brings good news,
who proclaims salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God rules!"**

Listen! Your lookouts lift their voice;
they sing out together!

**Right before their eyes they see the LORD returning to Zion.
Break into song together, you ruins of Jerusalem!**

The LORD has comforted his people and has redeemed Jerusalem.

**The LORD has bared his holy arm in view of all the nations;
all the ends of the earth have seen our God's victory.**

Living the Word

On the fifth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me five Gold Rings...Today is the fifth day of the twelve days of Christmas. Today we continue the celebration the best gift: God's good news, delivered by the baby Jesus – Emmanuel – God with us!

What is the good news to be shared this day?

As Christians celebrate God come-to-earth as the Messiah this week, it is wise to remember that Salvation is given so we will come together not break apart as a people. That in itself should be a source of comfort and celebration.

Like the pony express riders on the new frontier, the messenger brings this message as fast as the horse will go. We can almost feel the excitement of the messenger's heart pounding as he holds on for this breathtaking ride. The point is not to just carry this critical news, but to bring it urgently to all. The image of the messenger gives way to the sentinels on the high walls of the city shouting "Who goes there?" And the reply coming with great excitement: "The one you have been waiting for is coming."

The scriptures claim that even the sentinels are breaking into singing, when they see the Lord approaching. What might it mean for us to see the Lord returning? Today's church people might break into song with the Doxology or Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus."

Most of us are familiar with living between what God has done through Jesus and what God will do when Jesus comes again. After weeks of Advent waiting, which finally end with this week, surely we deserve some time of celebration instead of the reminder that our waiting is not over yet until Christ comes again. In our lives there is much we still have to deal with. But for this day each year, the joy we feel here is like a reflection in a mirror of what will be when God's promises are finally complete.

I want to share with you what the Northern Illinois United Methodist Bishop Sally Dyck, wrote in her Christmas letter a few years ago: "Imagine this. You go to church, and the pastor dumps a bag of manure in the center aisle. Soon the stench begins to overwhelm the other aromas: the cologne people received in their Christmas stockings, pine branches, candles burning. That might be the best Christmas sermon you could receive: a sensory message that jars your thinking about what Christmas is.

You see, the Christmas story begins with a certain stench. It's not just the cattle in the barn, but an economic situation where the emperor is taking a census to increase taxes in an already depressed economy. Political situations where people live as captives. Personal situations, such as Mary giving birth away from home. Her new family being homeless.

Christmas was born in stench. For many people this Christmas, life stinks. Today it stinks that Grandma has Alzheimer's and sometimes doesn't even recognize your voice. It stinks to get that cancer diagnosis. It stinks to endure surgery. For some, it stunk long before the economic downturn, before they lost their jobs, before they wondered if anything would ever be the way it once was, before they got cancer, before the divorce, before bad things happened. For others, the stink is fresh and new, overpowering in its physical and spiritual pungency. We've all faced times in our lives and with each other that stink.

But life stinks sometimes, whether we made the stink ourselves or it just happens to us like a pile of manure being dumped on our parade. Yet, even in the midst of the stink, the message of Christmas is: God is with us . . . and there must be a pony in there somewhere!

But how will people know God is with us and there's hope, like getting that pony, unless we who claim faith in Christ Jesus share that love with them? It's a sweet-smelling Christmas for others and us when we share the love of God, the love of family and a faith community, and a hope that only comes from Christ Jesus to make a difference in a world that sometimes really stinks."

This message from a Bishop, isn't all sweet and nice, but hits us in our reality. We all need God's promises to hold on to when it seems that our world is falling apart. Sometimes the message is what we need to hear, not what we just want to hear.

John the baptizer came as the precursor to Jesus. John was the messenger who prepared the way for the Messiah. John was an oddball of his day; Yet, he was known at conception as a miracle baby, and at birth as the cousin to Jesus, and as an adult as the messenger to pave the way for Christ.

Jesus was John's message, just as Jesus became the messenger as he taught, reminding the people of who God was. Jesus becomes not only the message, but also the messenger.

Author Anne Rice shares in her book "*Called Out of Darkness: A Spiritual Confession*" that it was her Christian upbringing before she could read which influenced her the most. Hearing the songs in worship, praying to God and Jesus, because she had been taught that they would listen to her and she trusted that. She said that sometimes her prayers were to Jesus the Christmas baby, sometimes – seeking confession and pardon - to the salvation Jesus on the cross and sometimes to the Jesus that was always with her.

Jesus was a messenger for her when she needed, giving her solace as she went. Anne Rice is now a messenger to any who will listen as she also shares the story of her ability to trust in faith, even in the dark times of her life and writing.

What about us as messengers? In some ways we are like John, given the task to prepare the way for Christ to come again, but we have more of the story than John did. Like John we have the same ancient traditions which include sharing the good news through an oral tradition.

We are all given a message and it is offered us through our life story. When we share how God is a part of our lives, we become storytellers able to spread the message we have been given. Anne began to receive the message through others sharing them with her, mostly by singing and speaking the message of good news.

We would all share the message in a different way, but the Christmas story should be real enough for us to be able to share it: [Census, Joseph, Mary with child, the donkey ride, no place to stay, Jesus in a manger; Shepherds, Angels, the trip to Bethlehem.] Jesus came to a humble couple, in a humble place and was worshipped first by some lowly shepherds.

You could share the story. Maybe it wouldn't be word for word from the book, but you know the story. A couple of weeks ago, we had a Christmas pageant here in the sanctuary. Everyone present each got a brown paper bag. Inside was the part they would play in the story.

As each set of characters (shepherds, angels, etc.) arrived at the front, playing their parts, they became a part of the story, and we then sang a carol to match their part. Like it or not, God may have used those moments to sing the message into their heart, just a little deeper.

Again Isaiah says: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger..." Can Isaiah be speaking of you? One "who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation" The message is told to share the joy and to give the hope.

What message do you give to people at Christmas? Do you say Merry Christmas, inviting them to the joy of God's message? Do you take the seasonal opportunity to be a blessing to someone? The Airline Captain picked up the speaker phone on the plane just before take-off and she said "Can I have everyone's attention please: Good afternoon, my name is Captain Anna Vendas. I'll be flying us to Vegas today. I have a very special announcement to make: On our flight today we have a very special passenger and this is a total surprise for him. On our flight today is my father, Mr. Carlos Gonzales.

Thanks to my father I was able to become a pilot. I have been flying for about 15 years; I have always wanted to have him on my flight. It is a pleasure to have him with us today. I love you daddy. Thank you for everything. Thank you for this. Thank you for life." Spontaneous clapping filled the plane as she comes forward and gave her father a hug.

The story says nothing about the Captain's feet, but because she delivered this message of love, they are beautiful, as is she. Don't tell the world about Jesus the Christ so someone will notice your feet, unless you are dancing and that is part of the message.

Tell the story because there is great Hope and Peace and Joy and Love within the message and we all can use some good news, until Christ returns.

Who is it? Who is the one or two or more that you have a message for that you haven't shared with yet? If you notice those around you, you might find many who need a message of hope or peace this season.

There are still 7 days of Christmas to be shared...Or who haven't you seen this season? Who is still around, but has been out of touch? Has God given you a message to share with them?

So let's take a moment right now and all look at our feet...beautiful!