

**Sermon Preached for The Academy of Parish Clergy Worship Service:
Dr. David T. Lee --February 24, 2016
“Nice Feet”
Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Romans 10:12-15, Luke 10:1-7**

Preface: It is more than an honor to be standing here this evening in the presence of people, with whom, for the most part, I share not only vocation, but because I know what you do, for whom I have the utmost respect. They tell you been selected from amongst your peers, from amongst people no doubt more deserving, for the honor. Then they say, oh by the way, you have to preach, too. It's more than a daunting task for sure. I appreciate this opportunity and find myself feeling more than a bit inadequate at the same time.

I'm a lectionary preacher and to have an occasion to go off lection (at least I didn't find APC Awards scriptures anywhere in the three year cycle) makes me remember sitting in homiletics class about 40 years ago and hearing Dr. Welford Hobbies' stern injunction to not decide what you were going to say in a sermon and then go search some scripture to back it up.

What you hear tonight may sound exactly like that . But, I looked to the leadership for this conference, Dr. Deanna Thompson and her commentary on Deuteronomy, and especially the portion of the commentary that speaks to the Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and to Dr. William

Tuck, with the topic: Choose Life: Preaching that Touches the Listener's Lives. I'd like to thank both for providing some direction. The very nature of this gathering, the care and feeding of parish clergy, in and of itself provides wonderful motivation.

In the end, however, it was a phone call from a parishioner who is no longer resident in my congregation that helped to foment the topic, if not the method. If you do not have a Libby McJunkin in your congregation -- I'm sorry. She's one of those people whose face you wanted to find sitting in the pews. A person who would respond to what was being said, be it good, mediocre or brilliant, with the same expression. On the first few Sundays of my present call as I greeted the congregation at the close of service she would come to me, take my hands in hers, look into my face and say, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" How absolutely affirming and challenging. She did so every Sunday for good, mediocre or brilliant sermons. For Libby it was the act. The faithful act of faithful preaching.

So its feet. Perhaps an indelicate subject. But its feet. It's how I see us. So feel free to slip off your shoes and wiggle your toes. Here we go.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

1 Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, **2** so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. **3** Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone **5** You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. **6** Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. **7** Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. **8** Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, **9** and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Romans 10:12-15

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. For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' 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? 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!'

Luke 10:1-7

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.

This is the word of the Lord:

Thanks be to God.

The family of multiple generations sat together in the cavernous study of the old man, almost ancient, known in this family and in this community only as 'rav.' He was the oldest and most revered of the rabbi's in the synagogue and greater Jewish community in the heart of this Brooklyn, NY neighborhood. Lately He's been advised to rest more, to curtail his duties in the congregation. This is family time. The Sunday evening meal is over and the family gathers, acutely aware of just how precious and evermore rare these moments in his presence are, not simply because he is so very busy, but because, as has been said, he is almost ancient. Just how many nights has he rested, in his study before the fire, a shawl draped over the intricately woven tallit, wrapped around his shoulders to ward off the chill in those old bones, with his equally ancient wife sitting next to him after sharing the simple fare of the evening meal, along with their sons and their wives, daughters and husbands, their children and grand children and great grandchildren and others, family close, all gathered together.

After breaking bread, they move now to the telling of stories, or more exactly to the listening to stories, the living history of this people with mystical echoes glimmering in the dulcet, lyrical tones of the old one,

speaking with a kind of reverence born of respect and a sense of the proper order of things.

Before she could grab him, the youngest child of the youngest mother scrambled from her care to the side of the old man. He nestles next to him and looks up into the ancient eyes now clouded with age and interrupts the story he is telling by pulling on the tassels of the shawl. Everyone holds their breath, especially the young mother, but the old man just reaches down and lifts him to his bosom holding him ever closer, motioning for the other children to sit at his feet, his tired, worn, corned, calloused, well travelled feet. And from deep down inside of himself there come the words all of them, even this youngest one has heard many, many times...because of all the words spoken, of all the words embodied and lived in these old bones, and extended to this progeny gathered, and to God's people in his care ...these words were by far the most important: lifting his gnarled hands before his face he begins, and the words emanate from deep, deep in his being....

Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Elohaynu Adonai Echad.

Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

After, as he blesses each one gathered, the eldest grandson kneels at the rev's feet and removes his shoes, left first, right second, and

replaces them with an old, old pair of carpet slippers, right first then left.

The younger man, a rabbi himself, looks up into the face of the one who for

him is the embodiment of God's love – and he mutters almost silently –

How lovely on the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news,

Who announces peace And brings good news of happiness, Who

announces salvation, And says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

(pause mood change)

550 miles away in Greensboro, NC, it's about 8 p.m. and the pastor of the small congregation is finally, gratefully, heading home after a full day in the life of the church. One of the elders, asks the pastor, known simply as Rev. Nancy, if she would like for him to lock up. She declines, saying that Robert, her eldest is in her study reading and she needs to leave herself a note about something someone said leaving worship this morning that she knows she'll forget if she doesn't write it down right now....

Walking from the fellowship hall to her office, turning out lights as she goes, including a push and a shout '**anyone in there**' at each bathroom, she notices trash that needs to be emptied, a good job for Robert, but no, he's done enough today, too, kindly staying to escort her home and on she goes. As she climbs the half flight of stairs she remembers her tablet that still sits atop the pulpit and she veers off into the dark and silent sanctuary

and down the aisle where her pace slows. Here she steals a kind of guilty pleasure as she reaches down and takes off her less than sensible shoes (the left of which is leaving another 12 hour plus Sunday scar on her instep) and she wishes that she would remember next Sunday to do a better job of picking shoes than she did in the dark at 6 this morning in order to arrive at the church to unlock, check the heating, plug in the coffee pot, switch on the sound system, and be at her desk by 7:30 to go over, and yes, sometimes rewrite her sermon. 12 hours, no 13 hours later, after early worship and Sunday school and late worship and fellowship where she was corned by Constance, again, who told her the entire saga of her brothers bout with the gout which made her late for officer training where newly elected Bob, former Lutheran, insisted on her explaining predestination, but for her to “do it quick” because Duke and Carolina were playing at 2. Then she had two hospital visits in two different hospitals of course and a five o'clock committee meeting and then the church supper for which she, of course, had nothing made so she had sent the aforementioned Robert to the grocery store for a large salad and he bought fried chicken – oh well – and finally she, now, boned tired, is questioning her career choice. “What was God thinking!?” So yes, by gosh, she takes off her shoes and the carpet feels wonderful and she climbs up the chancel steps to the pulpit,

something that even now, although she isn't preaching to anyone at almost 8:30 p.m. makes her pause and she get's **that** feeling... 8 and a half hours later and she has to really think about what she preached about. Slumping into the pulpit chair with only the occasional car headlights streaking across the stained glass windows she sighs deeply and even as it is passing her lips she wonders if it's one of those sighs that's too deep for words...(pause) overwhelmed and closing in on exhausted she utters a prayer of thanks to God for allowing her to know in this moment, in this place, in this house of worship who she is. She says out loud, 'peace to this house,' this house that sustains her as she sustains it, that comforts her as she offers comfort, that challenges her as she pushes and persuades and encourages and enables and cajoles and convinces these good folk that aren't just trying to be the church, but are the church. These children of God, that make her head spinning crazy as she, as boldly as she knows how, preaches the gospel.

Grabbing her tablet in one hand, her shoes in the other she remembers poor Robert and quickens her pace. Taking the shortcut through the choir loft she picks up a copy of that mornings anthem and walks out and back and into her office singing 'seek ye the lord while he may be found' to which Robert, sitting on her sofa says only, 'mother.' She

moves to the desk, looks under four stacks of papers to find a pen, grabs an old envelope with her Sojourners bill she needs to pay and writes down – Cathy, Bill, twins, baptism, May --- May--- (rub temple) call Cathy. She says to Robert, nose deep in a book, who hasn't even looked her way, 'ready to go.' 'Really,' he says, knowing her full well and making a joke about her sermon that morning he seems to remember, even of she doesn't, as if to get teenaged brownie points because he listened, 'really, gonna' shake the dust off and go?' Hanging her head, already pondering in her heart the fact that this one will most likely be the fifth generation of pulpit punchers in her family, she says, "I surrender...all." As they step into the hallway, Robert says, without a hint of sarcasm. "Nice feet mom, want me to grab your shoes?"

(pause)

Way across the country, deep in the inner city of LA, there's a storefront community church that is just gathering for a Sunday evening prayer meeting. The young pastor, who likes to be called 'the Rev.,' is strikingly handsome and looks a little bit like any of the kids who come to his services by way of tweets and instagrams and snapchats and facebook whom he greets as he stands on the on the sidewalk doing his best to meet, and invite as many people as possible from the busy street in for the

service not even attempting to be subtle about the fact that there's food inside. There's not really a 'organized' congregation here, more of a 'whenever 2 or 3' type of gathering, so he's just hustling to fill the seats. All sorts of people, all ethnicities, all ages... from the neighborhood most of them are of 'the least of these' variety.

He watches them gather, most of them moving to the hip hop cadence of a piece by Beautiful Eulogy called "Satellite Kite"¹ which is kind of like an call to worship/affirmation of faith: Which in relating with this preacher in no way seek to emulate:

This is unblemished **perfection**, relentless love descended with the **intention** to shed his blood, for the purpose of **redemption**.

Divine **intervention**, wrap your mind around how he laid his life down so sinners could be **forgiven**, every knee should bow before the **risen**. Who is God that establishes **dominion** over **minions** and is moved with creativity. And so the **ineffable unapproachable** God who invented space and the human heart invaded space to reach the depths of human hearts. It's all a part of his perfect plan – sinners in the hands of God holding on a **kite** string.

¹ Beautiful Eulogy called "Satellite Kite"

Connecting a redeemed **humanity** by the finished work the King of Kings. Look it up.

A guy walks by and puts up a fist for a bump and says ‘those are some fly kicks’ meaning of course his shoes. If you ask him, he would tell you that it was his feet that got him here. Not in these shoes but in a pair of track shoes. He definitely has the feet. Fast feet.

About 5 years ago, he hung up his track shoes. He bought a pair of sandals (seminary you know) and answering a nagging call he’s just fully beginning to understand, he got an M Div. He did an intern year at a large inner city parish and was challenged to take on this mission by a pastor of 40 years, who told him ‘go make a church.’ This mentor pastor, in consultation with the same one who sent out the seventy, sent this young man to this place, a laborer into a vineyard, a sheep amongst wolves... with an idea, a pair of fine shoes, a few books and a heart filled with holy spirit. It’s here that he preaches a gospel that’s true with a little hip hop thrown in and teaches grace and responsibility, and inclusion and counsels and commiserates and seeks solutions, and mops floors and moves tables and dances in those fly shoes with those beautiful feet – a lot.

It's been a year now and the Rev. and his beautiful feet are doing what the old rabbi and the parish pastor and the priest and all who are of any sort and variety of clergy seek to do. All of us who wear a tallit, or a mantle, or a robe, or a cassock, or a chasuble, or an alb, or a surplice, along with a stole, or a cincture, or a clerical collar, or jeans and a t-shirt. Out in the real world, on the streets and avenues of the city, on the lanes of tree lined neighborhoods, on the rural routes and along the hiways and byways. In storefronts, or in a Basilica, a Cathedral, a Dharma Center, a Duomo, a Chapel, A Mosque, or a Monastery, at a Shrine, in a Synagogue, in a Kirk, or a Meeting House, a parish, a Friend's house and a Kingdom Hall, with a name like 1st or 2nd or 3rd, or Good Shepherd, or Westminster, or Emmanuel or Mt. Bethel, or Celebration, St. Somebody, or Highlands and for all who have eyes to see and ears with which to hear "here's the church, here's the steeple, open the doors and find the people" – the people – the frighteningly fewer, the still seeking people, the redeemed, called chosen people, young and old people, as yet unknown people – that's the church...

That's the church that we, you and I, clergy people, called people, ordered people -- The Rev., right, most, Mister, Ms, or otherwise, Father, Padre, pastor, the priest, the imam, the clergy, the chaplain, the rector, the

minister, the apostle, the bishop, the rabbi, the sangha, the parson, preachers and even the pope – all who are called by God to be and do for God have a call and a charge as ancient and visceral and life giving and demanding and dangerous as the “shema” welling up inside us because the harvest is plentiful and we..... are the laborers...and we are far too few. We are the ones who embody and embrace and find life giving and transforming Paul’s words, Paul’s poignant and poetic and powerful words **“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? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?”**

Now and perhaps more than ever it is incumbent on we who are all of the above to **do** more and perhaps, as ghastly as the notion might be to people whose lives are all about words, **talk less**. It is vital in this world of creeping evasive darkness to keep the lights on in our buildings on the street corner, the rural road, the city center -- as a reminder, wherever we are, that the church is in this fray. As we are about the business of redefining church – which is of course in any shape and in any notion the people, it is essential for us, parish clergy, to revitalize the places in which we function and the way we function. We must embrace the virtual church.

But we must also dispel the notion that our churches are structures of bygone days. Museums and mausoleums. We must recreate inside our walls places for the community to gather in old and new ways, for mission to be done, for the sad to be embraced and the broken offered hope. and for us who are entrusted with sacred words to speak them without apology, with creativity and imagination – and most of all love. Always with inclusive love.

Our churches, visible symbols of bodies of people, the body of Christ, say to the drive by world – something happens there. There is light here that refuses to let darkness overcome it. The church is where the font is, the table is where the gospel is all fleshed out in chubby faced curious children and less than interested teens and in the minions trying to keep it together and the aging who just want the church to hang on with them. And for us, You, we, parish clergy, are called to get us and go, to follow Christ, to lead Christ's people, **To be the beautiful feet of those who bring good news!**

Amen.