

Romans 10:13-17
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
God's Church Revealed
Called!

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Winchester, VA
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February 10, 2019

¹³ **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

¹⁴ **How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”**

¹⁶ **But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” ¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.**

¹⁸ **But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: “Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”**

¹⁹ **Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, “I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.”**

²⁰ **And Isaiah boldly says, “I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.”**

²¹ **But concerning Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.”**

It's always amazing getting up here on a Sunday morning. I walk in, say a quick prayer, turn around and here you are, all ready for worship. I love seeing your smiling faces and joining you in worship week in and week out, but that's not the reason why I'm so amazed. The truth is, I look out into these pew seats and I see your faces and then I think to myself, “it is a miracle these people are here.” And I'm not saying that tongue in cheek, it is literally because of a miracle that you are here today. Jesus called you through His Gospel shared with you by people in your life so now you're here. It's the miracle of grace!

This morning, in the opening verses of our lesson from Romans, the Apostle Paul takes us behind the scenes of your story and mine to show us just how amazing it is that Jesus called each of us to faith in Him through His saving Gospel. At the same time, Paul encourages us to hear the Savior's call to take that Gospel to other people in our lives.

Before we get into all of that, I'd like to ask you to do something unpleasant. I want you to close your eyes and imagine for a moment what your life would be like right now if no one had ever told you about Jesus—not your parents, no relatives or friends, no co-workers or classmates, not a neighbor, not even a pastor. Imagine that Jesus' call to share the Gospel with you was simply ignored or rejected or put off for a later time that never happened—and you never found out about Jesus. You never learned about God's love for you that He sent a Savior to pay for the guilt of your sins and to give you eternal life.

So what would your life look like now? Would it be vastly different or would it look somewhat similar? Knowing how Jesus has impacted your life, if He was never in your life, would you have old or present guilt crushing your heart? Would you have grief eating away at your soul with loss and heartache? Would worry or restlessness be robbing you of any sense of lasting peace? Would you be a hardened skeptic, a self-centered pagan, or simply a guilty sinner trying to make up for it every day with meager acts of kindness? What would your life be like without Jesus?

It might be successful. It might be full of the things and people of this life. It may even be mostly pleasant, but what about the end? It would end in an awful way being separated from God because of your sin; separated from God and His merciful love forever in hell.

You can stop imagining now. Jesus has not made your life free of the unpleasant or the painful. And so long as we're sinful human beings living in a sinful world, that shouldn't surprise us. What Jesus has done is change our lives entirely by bringing His good news to us. You can be assured that the passage Paul quotes in verse 13 from the prophet Joel is true for you: **Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**

Through the Gospel, the Lord of grace has saved you. That, by itself, is incredible, and yet what's even more amazing is how you got to that point. Paul pulls back the curtain. He shows us how God in His mercy had to guide the entire sequence of events that Jesus used to call you to faith in Him through the Gospel. Paul asks a series of four questions that all had to be answered for you to become a believer **who calls on the name of the Lord.**

First, **How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?** To call on the name of the Lord you have to actually trust and believe in Him. Something which, on our own, none of us could have nor would have ever done. You can't call on the name of the Lord without saving faith in Him. **And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?** That takes us back to that unpleasant scenario that I just had you imagine. If you had not heard about Jesus as your Savior, you would not have come to faith in Him. You couldn't have! Nothing inside of you could or would ever have made that happen. Paul lays it out plain and simple in verse 17: Faith in Jesus doesn't come from something innate we all carry inside us, **faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word about Christ.** At some point in your life, the Lord had to bring you into contact with the hearing of His Word.

And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? Someone in your life had to tell you about Jesus your Savior for you to hear that good news and come to faith in Jesus. Someone had to take that opportunity to share with you the forgiveness, the peace, the love of Christ your Savior—news you couldn't and wouldn't have heard anywhere else.

And finally, **how can they preach unless they are sent?** That someone had to answer the Savior's call to share the Gospel with you. That doesn't mean that Jesus appeared to them in a dream at night or some vision during the day, but through His Word, Jesus calls people like us to go with the Gospel to the people in our lives, to **preach the good news to all creation** (Mark 16:15), to **make disciples of all nations** (Matthew 28:19), to **give the reason for the hope that we have** (1 Peter 3:15) so others can have that same hope.

Jesus used someone to do that for you! Maybe it was your parents. Maybe it was a relative, a friend, or a neighbor. Maybe it was a pastor who was called to proclaim the message

of God's love in Christ to you. We shudder to imagine how different our lives would be if the Lord had not provided those people to answer His call to share that Gospel with us.

Paul adds to that final question a quote from the prophet Isaiah. **How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!** So maybe this week instead of a heart shaped valentine you can make a foot shaped valentine and give it to someone you love who has shared the good news of Jesus with you and tell them, "your feet are beautiful!" Okay, what *does* Paul mean by that? When someone brings you good news, it fills you with joy, relief, excitement, even hope. You're so happy to receive such good news—a child is born, a surgery was successful, a diagnosis is negative, a building will be built. If you've been mired in worry, flirting with despair, or lost in your own self-centeredness, the timing couldn't be better. In a sense, the feet of those who bring good news couldn't have arrived at a better, more perfect time than they did for you in your life.

Couldn't the same be said of those who brought the good news of Jesus into your life? Isn't it true that the feet of those who brought you the good news of Jesus couldn't have arrived at a better, more perfect time in your life? It's amazing, isn't it? That messenger or those messengers of God's good news of Jesus came exactly when God wanted them to come into your life.

They came with the most beautiful news of all, the news of a Savior who took your guilt on His own shoulders on a cross, who dried your tears with the resurrection comfort that only He can give, who brought peace to your soul and purpose to your life by fixing your eyes on Him and the life He sets before us, who turned us from the road to hell to the path to heaven—and it was God who accomplished it all. He sent out His Gospel. He provided the messenger(s). He provided the opportunity for you to hear the Gospel, and He broke through your hardened heart and planted the news of His love for you there so that you could believe it. And because of that, you—all of you—are able to **call on the name of the Lord** in the full assurance that you **will be saved**.

As you consider how amazing God in His mercy has been to you, you might start to see a problem. The Apostle Paul himself saw it. **But they have not all obeyed the gospel**, he says. **For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?'** It's true. Not everyone listens when they hear the good news of Jesus. In fact, many reject that message. They "don't have time for it." It sounds "too easy." They don't want to follow a God who came to save 2,000 years ago. They don't want that Gospel to take over their lives. They may want to put it off until they're old and need it since they don't see the need for Jesus or his good news in their lives right now.

It's easy to take that personally. It's easy to throw up your hands in frustration when you try to tell someone about Jesus and they don't want to listen. Then you start doubting. "Maybe I'm really not good at this. So maybe I just shouldn't talk about Jesus anymore." But as we saw and talked about last week too, when we have those doubts we aren't just doubting ourselves, we're actually doubting the power and ability of God and His Word to transform hearts and change minds. We're doubting if the effort, here and now, is really worth it when so many could care less what you have to say about Jesus. But if the effort for what is worth it? What we're contemplating is the effort required to bring the news of rescue to someone that can save them from an eternal existence of disconnection from God and all of His blessings. We begin to doubt

if God really does keep His promise that people who hear the good news of Jesus come to faith in Him and are saved. So you start avoiding or putting off opportunities to talk about Jesus with others.

So the Lord has something to say about that—a promise that it’s not about you or about how you tell someone about Jesus. No, it’s about His Word and the ability of His Word to create faith in the stony soil of unbelieving human hearts. **Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.** Jesus simply calls us to be the messengers with that saving Gospel message.

When you stop to think about it, it is a miracle that any one of us is here today. God arranged all things to bring you here. He made the good news of salvation known and called messengers with timely, “beautiful” feet to tell you about Jesus your Savior. Then through that good news, He created life in your dead and sinful heart, opened your blind eyes, and rescued you from death.

Now the Savior calls you to be His messenger—to take the good news of His salvation to people in your life and to people who will come into your life. Kids, if you haven’t decided what you’re doing with your life yet, consider whether God could use you as a pastor or a teacher in His Church taking his Gospel to others as a called messenger. For all of us, we need to keep in mind that Jesus doesn’t ask us to argue people into heaven. He doesn’t ask you to present complex theological discourses to convince people to believe. He simply asks you to sow the seed of His Gospel and to trust Him to grow it. So many people need what Jesus has done for you! But this time you get to be the one with the beautiful feet. You get to be just the right person at just the right time in their life. Let’s see what our God and His miracle-working Word can do when we answer His call.

Amen