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Proper 14, August 9, 2020
Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33

“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.” Our good news comes to us this morning in an unlikely package. We just heard a series of readings full of imperfect characters. First we hear a complex, messy family story from the book of Genesis. The writer tells us that “this is the story of the family of Jacob.” Maybe it’s no surprise that this is a messy story if we remember that Jacob, the patriarch of the clan, became the patriarch by deceiving his older brother Esau. This family line starts with deception. And the story of Joseph and his brothers is a mess. Joseph taunts them with his dreams of power over them. His father, Jacob, doesn’t help the situation any by clearly favoring his young son over his older brothers. The brothers are so jealous of Joseph, with his arrogance and their father’s favoritism, that some of them are ready to kill him off. But some vestige of brotherly love saves him. They decide that he is family, after all, so they can’t kill him. Instead they sell him off for 20 pieces of silver. Some brotherly love!! This is not the picture of the healthy family that most of us aspire to. These descendants of Abraham and Sarah are the original dysfunctional family. Yet this family gave birth to the People of God. God doesn’t wait for perfection – God works with what *is* in order to bring about what *can be*. The Reverend Lisa Greenwood says in a commentary on this passage: “God works not only through what is healthy and happy, but also in the midst of the realities of dishonesty, rivalries, and even violence. God moves and stirs and calls and heals imperfect individuals, who make up chaotic, knotty family systems, in order to weave together the people of God.”¹

¹ *The CEB Women’s Bible*. Nashville: Common English Bible, 2016, 53.

In Paul's words to the Romans this morning, we hear him wrestling with imperfection, too. Paul tells the Romans that it's not perfect adherence to the law that makes them righteous in the eyes of God. No human being can ever be perfect in the law – after all, there are some 613 laws in the Torah. Paul says, it's about your heart – your intention – your willingness to ask for forgiveness knowing that all is forgiven in Jesus. Paul tells the Romans that faith is not about waiting to ascend to heaven or about avoiding hell – it's trusting that the word is near, right here, right now, even in the face of our sin and the dysfunction of our world. The Word is right here working among us, flawed as we may be. God doesn't wait for perfection. God works with what *is* in order to bring about what *can be*.

That's certainly good news for Peter. We see the perfectly imperfect Peter in today's Gospel wrestling with faith. The Gospel story doesn't say that Peter is afraid of the storm. He was a fisherman. He was used to being battered about on the waves. It wasn't the storm that scared him. It was Jesus walking toward him on the water that terrified him. Even after Jesus says, "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid," Peter doesn't quite believe him. Jesus is trying to take charge and Peter says, "Now hang on a minute. How do I know I can trust you?" This isn't the perfect faith we would expect out of the one that Jesus later calls the Rock upon which He will build his church. But God doesn't wait for perfection. God works with what *is* in order to bring about what *can be*. Peter obviously loves Jesus and he wants to follow him and trust him. And sometimes he does. When Jesus says, "Come," Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water. He knows that this is Jesus and with him he has nothing to fear. But when Peter's attention focuses back on the storm and the strong wind, his fear gets the better of him and he starts to sink. Jesus doesn't let him sink. He reaches out his hand. Jesus doesn't tell him to

get it together first, or to get his ducks in a row. He doesn't ask him to decide what he wants. He doesn't demand a perfect declaration of faith. Jesus simply reaches out his hand.

Just as he did with Peter, Jesus takes us where we are and reaches out his hand. In the face of imperfection in our faith life, in our families, in our civic life, in our church Jesus reaches out his hand to us and invites us to take it. The Word is right here and right now in the midst of our struggle to be all that God calls us to be. Peter went on to make more mistakes and Jesus continued to reach out his hand in forgiveness and the promise of new life. Jesus reaches out his hand to us when we falter, when life gets to be overwhelming. Will we take it?

As we head into another week of this pandemic and the ongoing struggle for racial justice, as we head into another week of life in our less than perfect families, our less than perfect church, our flawed civic life, my prayer is that we can notice where Jesus is reaching out his hand to us. I pray that we will take that hand and let Jesus bring us the calm, the wisdom, the strength that we need to be at peace and to bring good news to one another.

It's interesting to note that Matthew doesn't tell us what Peter said in response to Jesus. He tells us that "those in the boat worshipped him saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'" Maybe Peter didn't need to say anything. Maybe he was resting in the care of Jesus and allowing Jesus to heal him and transform him into all that God created him to be.

It was Peter's actions in the midst of the storm that led the others to see that Jesus is God with us.

"How beautiful are the feet (the imperfect feet) that bring good news!"