

This Is Jesus—Let Me See Your Feet

A Sermon by David Barker

Scripture: Amos 7:7-17
Luke 10:25-37

I want to begin this morning not with the Gospel reading from Luke or Old Testament reading from Amos, but in an altogether different place: Genesis 12

First 11 chapters, God has made clear God's intentions for creation, including we humans, but willfulness, deceit, and evil have entered picture, as God knew they would

- but God has a program...a program that begins here in Genesis 12 with the call of Abraham, still known at this point as Abram
- and, as verses 1-3 make clear, the program is simple:

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

- God's program is made up of two ideas
 - first: Abraham must go forth...he cannot stay put
 - second: Abraham and his offspring are to be a blessing to all peoples
- note how this is to be accomplished
 - Abraham and his offspring are to go, and among the people they meet they are to live
 - their lives are to bear witness to God and through their lives, blessing will occur
- that's the plan
 - remainder of Scriptural witness, unfolding of human history is God's efforts, through God's people, to work the plan
- now: some of you are probably wondering, what about all the killing and slaughter later in the Old Testament—where's the blessing in that?
 - since you won't let me preach 30 minutes, you're going to have to settle for a smug answer: God's ways are not our ways
- point is, how God's people live is vehicle by which God's blessings are shared

This, ultimately, is the reason for all the law...all those often inscrutable rules, regulations find in Deuteronomy, Leviticus...all the jots and tittles that, later, the Pharisees worked so hard to protect

- but it stands to reason: if *how* God's people live is central to God's program, then all areas, every detail of life is to be defined relative to God
- the idea is that your relationship with God so completely structures your life that living a Godly life becomes *intuitive*
 - don't have to think about it because you've internalized it all...your heart, your mind, your soul and all that means have been shaped in relationship with God, and by knowledge of God's desires and commands
 - and your actions reflect that...you don't have to think about what God would have you do, you just intuitively do it

Which, of course, God's people fail, again and again, to do

- but in all fairness, the demands and enticements of the world make intuitive living tough
- so, God sends prophets like Amos to remind God's people of the program
- the image of plumb line *is* the program: God has expectations of how God's people are to live...to be a blessing...if you don't live that way, there are consequences...for you, for the world
 - I'm fed up with this, God essentially says: *I will never again pass them by*, which means, I will spare them no longer, and God doesn't
 - many lose their lives, part of the killing and slaughter I can't preach long enough to explain
- and note: what Amos says, the religious establishment of the day doesn't want to hear
 - go be a prophet someplace else, they tell him
 - to which Amos responds, I'm no prophet...I'm not a preacher, not even a preacher's kid
 - I tend cattle...and I cut the fruit of sycamore trees to help it ripen and grow
 - which sounds suspiciously like what a prophet does...speaking the word of God, a word that oftentimes cuts, to help God's people grow
 - something Jesus picked-up on in talking about the need to bear fruit for the Kingdom

And, thus, we find ourselves at Luke 10:25-37...

²⁵ *Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.*

- not lawyer in sense you and I would understand today, but an expert in Mosaic law
- he knows the answer to the question he's about to ask, or so he thinks...so this isn't information-seeking on his part...it's an attempt to trap Jesus

"Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ *He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"* ²⁷ *He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."*

- the lawyer's answer, of course, is what we know as the Great Commandment
- it's a summary, in other words, of all the law and all the words of the prophets...what God, through people like Amos, was trying to communicate to the Israelites starting with Abraham
 - it is, in fact, the key to living an intuitive life, to being a blessing to others
- so, were you to ask Jesus as the lawyer did, what, Jesus, is the program?, this is how Jesus likely would've responded
- and so it is Jesus says to him...

²⁸ *"You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."*

- in the Greek, "do this" is an imperative: no argument, must do it
- word translated here "live" doesn't mean "biological life"...it's more nuanced than that, more nearly meaning living a blessed life as a child of God

Now, that should've been the end of the conversation...but remember I said earlier that the demands and enticements of the world make intuitive living tough

- having heard Jesus' take on God's program, the lawyer wants to justify and defend *his* take on it, so...

²⁹ *But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"* ³⁰ *Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.*

- this is not just any priest—Greek is specific: this is a *Jewish* priest, one of the Chosen
- and "passed on the other side" makes it sound like he just happened to be on the other side of the road
 - what the Greek actually says is that the priest went out of his way to avoid the man

³² *So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.*

- not a priest this time but a member of the priestly class...he, too, went out of his way to avoid him

³³ *But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.*

- to fully appreciate what this meant to the lawyer listening to Jesus, we have to understand something about Jews and Samaritans
- Jews avoided traveling through Samaria whenever possible, animosity between them was so great
- there's much history involved as to why—suffice it to say Jews looked upon Samaritans as a lesser form of humanity
 - a Samaritan tending to the man, therefore, was tantamount to an African-American stopping to help an Anglo in the deep South in the 1950s
- by no stretch of the imagination, then, would the lawyer hearing this story regard the Samaritan as a neighbor to anyone other than another Samaritan

³⁴ *He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'*

- think about what the Samaritan did...entirely on his own...he didn't call 911 or police... didn't think, I can't do this, I shouldn't get involved, I don't have time for this...
- he just acted...intuitively
- had this been you or me today, it would've meant we doctored the man's wounds, put him dirty and bloody into our car, drove him to the nearest hotel where we stayed with and took care of him overnight, then gave the hotel manager enough money to cover a two month stay to continue the man's care until we come back and get him
- the word translated "pity" at the end of verse 33 doesn't mean "pity" at all...it means "compassion"

³⁶ *Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

- Go, Jesus says—another imperative—go and do likewise
- define *neighbor* for me, Jesus, the lawyer had asked, and Jesus does
 - the fact someone lives next door or across the street does not define *neighbor*
 - the fact you recognize someone does not define *neighbor*
 - in fact, *neighbor* is not defined by proximity or familiarity at all...
 - neighbor* is defined by need and compassion
- defined by need and compassion because in the program, *all* the nations and *all* people are our neighbors

When God called Abraham, he didn't tell him to go start a church...didn't tell him to organize a committee or hold a meeting

- God told Abraham, go forth and live as I will show you how to live and through the way that you live, you will be a blessing
- we're not to ignore church or avoid church, certainly not to diss church...the church is, after all, a gift of God to God's creation
- but the church is to be in service to the program...the program is not to be in service to the church

- churches go through times of uncertainty and anxiety, and at such times, our default reaction almost always is, oh my gosh—we gotta hire more staff, do new programs, do old programs better so we can get more people to come to church
 - but God's program is not to grow the church...God's program is to grow the Kingdom
 - rather than investing so much energy and resources into doing church better, we might invest them instead in learning to live more intuitively...to more fully embrace loving God and loving God's people
- which may mean, as it did to the lawyer in Mosaic law, being willing to expand our concept of *neighbor*

In his book *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*, John Ortberg talks about "spiritual comfort zones"

- we all have one, and if we're going to grow in our faith, in our capacity to live intuitively, we have to enlarge our spiritual comfort zones
- we do that, Ortberg says, a step at a time
 - you can't just sit comfortably in the boat...you gotta step out...which means you're going to get your feet wet

Just outside the city limits of San Marcos, Texas, where I served before moving here, there was a community called Redwood

- going to Redwood was like setting foot in a third world country...you wondered how poverty like that could exist in a country as prosperous as ours
- it was a scary place and I'm ashamed to admit, going there was way outside my comfort zone
- the first time I went to Redwood, it was to feed lunch to several hundred children
 - during the school year, they received free lunch at school
 - during the summer, they didn't eat lunch
- it had rained heavily the night before and we were struggling to put up this big tent...the plan was to serve lunch under the tent
 - putting up the tent, I'd been so careful to avoid the mud and the muck, but at one point, I put my foot right in a puddle of mud and water and sunk to my ankle
 - I said, oh shoot—or words to that effect

My foot was soaked, and before I was done that day, I was sopped from the knees down...but we got that tent put up, and children who otherwise wouldn't have eaten, *did*

Last week, we talked about the first element in a vision of what it means to be church, what it means to be the Lord's heart and hands right here, right now

--that we are called not to be served, but to serve

The second is that we have to have a new scorecard of what constitutes success...that the measure of our success will no longer be increase in membership but increase in community impact...no longer an increase in church activity but community transformation...

--that the focus is not on growing the church, but on growing the Kingdom

You see, my guess is that Jesus appreciates big churches with lots of people and lots of programs, but I've come to believe with all my heart that even more than that, Jesus wants churches to be a blessing to their community

--so, were Jesus to show up here one Sunday morning, I bet he wouldn't count heads...

I bet he wouldn't ask to see our programming brochure or our budget...I bet he'd ask to see our feet

--because he'd want to know: are they wet or are they dry?