Pre-sermon reading: Isaiah 52:7-10

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What images come into your head when you hear the words “beautiful feet”? I think of my wife’s beautiful feet, with her toes painted a special crimson for the holidays.

Maybe baby’s feet?

Cute, little, adorable, tickle-able, munchkin baby feet. Awww!
Maybe a model’s feet? - blazed bronze and pedicured to perfection. Whatever images your mind might conjure up, they surely would not picture a typical messenger’s feet as mentioned here in Isaiah.

In ancient days there were no mobile phones, no e-mails, no text messages, no tweets or status updates...there weren’t even land line telephones or mail boxes. Shocking, I know. News and messages got delivered the “good ole’ fashioned way,” by individuals on horse back, or more often, via their feet. Messengers would deliver the communications traveling over and through the rugged hill country of Palestine. Sometimes this meant running the dispatch through disputed territory and dodging potential thieves, enemies and other dangers.

Thinking of these ancient messengers, the terrain they traversed and the distance they covered I think of the Greek messenger Pheidippides who ran the “first marathon” bringing the news of victory at the Battle of Marathon to the leaders of Athens. Upon his completion of the 26.2 mile course he delivered his message and promptly collapsed and died. For those of you who do not know I enjoy marathon distance running and am in midst of training for my fifth and sixth marathons. Elizabeth (my wife) can tell you that my feet are pretty “uglified” these days due to my marathon training. I have calluses, blackened toenails and blistered heels…and this, with the aide of modern shoe
technology! As I imagine these messengers running in their bare feet or with flimsy ancient sandals across rocky and mountainous terrain, I shudder to think about the state of their feet upon arrival. Maybe this picture from a recent 51 mile race in Mexico can give us a small idea of what the feet of Isaiah’s messenger would look like:

![Feet of a runner](image)

When Isaiah mentions the beauty of these messenger’s feet he must be referring to something other than the messenger’s podiatric nightmares.

The luster of the messenger was not in the physical appearance of their feet, but in the message those feet carried. In the Old Testament there is this story in 2 Samuel where messengers bring bad news to King David. King David gets upset at the messengers because they brought unsatisfactory message, not because of their need for a pedicure.
Oppositely, a messenger bringing good tidings was often cheered for, showered with gifts and given great honor. Had Pheidippides not died he would have been the center of the party in Athens that evening. So when Isaiah mentions “how beautiful are the feet” of the messenger, he is referring to the message they bring, not the feet they run on; and the message of this messenger in Isaiah 52 is a glorious one of good news, hope, peace and salvation.

Indeed, the messenger of Isaiah 52 is overflowing with this message of great joy and beauty. The word ‘publishes’ comes from the Hebrew root for ‘fat’, ‘oil’ or ‘to overflow with oil’ שָׁמַע. This messenger is so full of good news that he is bursting at the seams to announce it. Just as Pheidippides brought the Athenians news of victory, so too does the messenger of Isaiah 52. He announces that God again will reign over Israel, and indeed over all the earth. He declares that peace shall come and all in his kingdom shall have their salvation. No more do we need fear our enemies!

Who is this messenger we might ask? Who is it that brings such great news concerning God’s reign? In v. 8 it says, “The voice of your watchmen - they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion!” Here, the watchmen are described as announcing the return of the Lord to the city. In Isaiah’s day, watchmen were posted at the gates of a city to see approaching enemies, foreign
dignitaries or messengers. These watchmen in Isaiah see the messenger of v. 7 and they recognize and know him to be the LORD their God!

This messenger with beautiful feet, the one bringing the good news of salvation, is none other than Jesus Christ – and he has the most beautiful of feet of all.

Here at Christmas time we picture the feet of baby Jesus (much like the baby’s feet we saw earlier); but we must always keep in mind what Jesus’ feet would look like years later after he walked his way to the cross:

This image shows Jesus’ feet at their most beautiful. This picture shows where this baby Jesus is headed throughout his ministry – from the stable to the mountains, from the
sea to the cross, Jesus’ mission is not only to bring, but bring about the message of the Gospel.

As his feet are pierced, his head is crowned in singeing pain and his side is gorged he bears our sin and is wounded for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5). Upon his feet shall come the punishment that will procure, publish and proclaim our peace. Again, we hear the words of Isaiah, how beautiful are these feet that bring such good news!

Yet, this peace of Christ, this message of good news and hope, can be hard to imagine when you start to think of everyday life. When you start to think about the myriad of ways we hurt each other – from petty family arguments to massive wars of greed, from disagreements over the color of the church carpet to mass genocide; peace is hard to imagine in our world today.

And still Christ’s feet bring the message of good news, peace and salvation. God reigns! Christ is born this day! Peace on earth, good will to men! Christmas is a time where we celebrate peace, we proclaim “peace on earth and good will to humankind,” the word is on our lips, over our doorways and in our shop windows. Knowing the violent reality of our world does not aver the message Christ provides and proclaims in our hearts and minds. His peace still reigns.

The enmity that existed between humankind and God because of sin has now been put to death, and peace defines our relationship with LORD Almighty. No longer do we need
to fear his wrath, we can now rejoice in his favor. It is a peace that is beyond this world (John 14:27). This means God’s peace, given to us, is a peace that endures past the turmoil and troubles of this world. It is a peace that overlooks the ways we are violent towards one another and a peace that overshadows the turbulence of sin still running rampant in our relationships. It is a peace that is more powerful than anything this world throws our way. Amidst a world where things pass away this is a peace which abides.

Finally, this peace that we, as Christ followers, have is a peace of wholeness, of contentment in a world fraught with greed and turmoil. It is a peace that speaks shalom. “Shalom” is a Hebrew word for peace and it means to be complete, whole and totally at rest in God. Today, the word shalom is used to say both ‘hello’ and ‘goodbye’ in Jewish culture. This peace that transcends and greets us in Christ alone is also, like shalom, a peace that sends. It is a ‘goodbye’ that dispatches us outside the safety of the church sanctuary, as it did Christ out of the security of his creche, and out into a world so desperately in need of the peace that God brings in Jesus Christ.

After his feet were nailed to the cross and he was forsaken for our sin Jesus rose from the tomb and walked to where his disciples were hiding in a locked room, not expecting any visitors (John 20:19-23). Obviously a little freaked out at the sudden appearance of a man they thought dead, he comforts them with the words “Peace be with you.” After a double check to see if it really was Jesus (yes, indeed his beautiful pierced feet confirmed his presence) he repeated, “Peace be with you” and then he sent them on a mission, as he sends us. He said to them, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am
sending you." He then gave them the Holy Spirit and sent them out to forgive others, to
publish peace and bring the good news wrought by his beautiful feet some two
thousand years ago. So too he sends us to bear the good news of Christmas, the peace
of Calvary and the salvation of Christ Jesus.

And so, this Christmas may you behold the beautiful feet of Jesus. May you know the
path they would trod and the nails that would bore these beautiful feet for our sake and
our sin. May we proclaim and herald the good news that peace has come to our sin
soaked world, salvation is here in the person of Jesus Christ and truly God reigns over
all and in all and through all. May we sing together throughout the ends of the earth,
“how beautiful are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace on earth,
good will towards all!” May the peace of the Lord be with you always. Amen.

Post sermon, sing the song “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” by H.W. Longfellow
as performed by Casting Crowns - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7670CXvPX0:

v. 1- I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

v. 2- And thought how, as the day had come
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

v. 3 - Till ringing, singing on its way
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

v. 4 - And in despair I bowed my head
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,
“For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”

v. 5 - Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men.”