

Next 45

45th Anniversary Celebration, September 26, 2021 | Romans 10:13-15
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WHAT DO YOU CELEBRATE?

Celebrations usually look back.

Take Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving usually draws out memories of Pilgrims and the early days of European settlement in the Americas. It also looks back at the past year to celebrate with gratitude the good things God has done.

As much as celebrations usually look back, they also create a sense of anticipation.

We look forward to them!

I remember that, when I was in grade school, holidays kept the year rolling from Labor Day right through Easter, but from Easter through Memorial Day, there was nothing. It was the longest season in the school year because there was nothing to look forward to other than school getting out, and I remember feeling like we would NEVER get there.

Sometimes celebrations have as much to do with the future as the past. Weddings really celebrate the future. We're really celebrating the lifetime two people will spend together.

This weekend we are celebrating 45 years of history.

We're remembering our founders, their lives, their bold steps, the dream they started this church with, and their amazing accomplishments.

We are celebrating Pastor Jay Abramson, his wife Liz, and the 25 years of senior leadership they gave to this church.

We're remembering what this church has done in 45 years. We have brought people together, we've brought people to the Lord, we've stood for truth, and we've spread the Gospel.

As we celebrate the past, we're celebrating impacting the world for Christ!

What we've done to change the world for Christ is what truly matters about this church.

Celebrating impacting the world for Christ calls us forward as much as it points us back.

This weekend as we're looking back at our first 45 years and celebrating, we're also looking ahead. If Jesus waits to come again and we have another 45 years or more of ministry ahead of us, then we want to do things with these 45 years that are worth celebrating. Why?

IMPACTING THE WORLD FOR CHRIST CAUSES CELEBRATIONS!

In Romans 10:13-15, Paul told us that impacting the world for Christ causes celebrations.

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach

unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

In verse 13, Paul summarized a discussion he had been having about who can be saved.

In the preceding chapters, Paul had been asking how one comes to salvation.

Paul said that there was always a way to God and to salvation by keeping God's Law perfectly.

However, there is now a way to God and to salvation through faith.

If we believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess openly that Jesus is Lord, Paul said, then we can be saved.

Paul is summarizing all of that in verse 13. Everyone who believes that God raised Jesus from the dead and that Jesus is Lord will be saved.

Paul realized, however, that this teaching created a problem which he addressed in verses 14-15.

We can't call on the name of the Lord until we believe the Good News.

We can't believe the Good News, though, until we hear it!

But we can't hear the Good News until someone preaches it to us or shares it with us.

And no one will ever share the Good News about Jesus with us until they're sent to do so.

Let's go back to the beginning again. Those who confess that Jesus is Lord will do so because they believed the Good News that Jesus raised him from the dead because someone told them that Good News because someone sent out a messenger.

That makes the messengers the church sends out critically important. Beautiful, you might say. They are worth celebrating!

Paul drew a verse from Isaiah the prophet that recognized there are moments to celebrate.

The verse came from Isaiah 52.

In the early chapters of the book of Isaiah, God was warning his people that they were following him in a ritualistic way but that they didn't really love him with their hearts.

As a result, they were leaning on foreign alliances and false gods to keep them safe.

God promised them that they would face consequences for their disobedience in the future. They would spend a time in exile in a foreign land. The Babylonian Empire would invade Judah, destroy Jerusalem, and carry many of the people off to exile.

However, at the end of the book, God promised a day when judgment would be over.

While these chapters point us far forward in time to the life, death, resurrection, and return of Jesus, first they talk about people coming home from Exile.

In Isaiah 52 there is line about a messenger who would announce that God is in charge, God is coming back to Jerusalem, and the Exiles are returning to Jerusalem as well.

Isaiah said, "How beautiful...are the feet of him who brings good news."

What a great way to put it! That messenger's feet are beautiful!

That's a compelling way to communicate the fact that the messenger who would bring that news would be welcomed and honored. That messenger's arrival would cause a celebration.

Paul drew on this verse to say that impacting the world for Christ is an even better reason to celebrate!

He wrote, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

By reusing what Isaiah wrote centuries earlier, Paul was making a point.

Paul was saying, "When a messenger announced the return of the Exiles, you were excited."

Having the opportunity to connect with God, being forgiven of sin, being adopted into God's family, being given new life, and receiving eternal life with God is much, much better news!

If the messenger who announced the return of the Exiles from captivity had "beautiful feet," then wouldn't the person who told you how to be saved have even more beautiful feet?

Impacting the world for Christ is a great, great reason to celebrate!

GOD HAS **EQUIPPED** US TO IMPACT OUR WORLD FOR CHRIST

Back in Romans 10:13-15, Paul told us certain unique individuals would impact the world for Christ.

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

For people to call on the name of the Lord, they must believe.

For them to believe the Good News about Jesus, they must hear.

For people to hear the Good News about Jesus, someone must share it.

God almost always chooses to work through someone to impact the world for Christ.

Our founders realized what unique potential the people of the Farmington Valley have for Christ.

If you've been part of these celebrations, then you've heard that Rooney Mentzer (one of our founders) spoke one time about how they understood the people of our region.

The people of the Farmington Valley are incredibly blessed.

People here have had the best educations available in the world.

People here are incredibly driven, hard-working, and talented.

Rooney recognized that well-educated, talented, hard-working, successful people also tend to lean on themselves for everything they need in life. However, he also recognized that when well-educated, talented, hard-working, successful people become followers of Jesus, they have the opportunity to change the world dramatically.

My appointment calendar, email inbox, and prayer list have been full lately just with Valley folks impacting the world for Christ right now!

I talked with one couple recently who has started a ministry that works with people who have been homeless but who are transitioning back to stable housing. They provide everything those families need to start a home again. They're doing so to impact those families for Christ.

I met with another couple who have dedicated their lives to working with police, firemen, emergency medical personnel, and veterans who are facing stressful moments in life. They come alongside and help them to deal with the trauma they encounter in those critical lines of work. They're doing so to impact those individuals, their families, and our community for Christ.

I received prayer requests from one of our Valley families that now lives and works in France, seeking to reach Muslims living in that country. They're impacting generations for Christ.

And I received prayer requests from one of our Valley missionaries who now lives in Thailand, where he is working for an agency that fights human trafficking and helps the victims of human trafficking find new lives and Christ. Ultimately, he's impacting an entire society for Christ.

That's just the beginning of what Valley folks are doing to impact the world for Christ!

Our vision statement elegantly summarizes what we're talking about:

"Our vision is to build a community of believers who actively impact our world for Christ."

Our vision statement isn't just something that we put on a plaque on the wall.

It summarizes the dream our founders had when they started Valley.

It summarizes what we've done for the past 45 years.

It also summarizes what we need to be doing as we start these next 45 years!

That vision statement means more to each one of us than we probably realize:

You are the one God plans to use to impact our world for Christ!

God, his glory, his truth, and his plan are always the fundamental focus for Valley.

Beyond that, though, the people of Valley are our focus.

You are the job. Bringing you together, equipping you with the tools you need, and sending you out to impact the world for Christ are exactly what this church exists to do.

If God has called you here to Valley, then it is certainly because he intends to use you to impact the world for Christ.

I hope that statement gets your heart pumping because the thought of what you will do is truly exhilarating! Beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!

GOD HAS CALLED US TO IMPACT OUR WORLD FOR CHRIST

Once more, in Romans 10:13-15, Paul pointed us to a world that needed to be impacted.

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Paul wrote about the process of sending people, but he also saw the end. Lost people would come to know Christ, disciples would be multiplied, and the world would change.

Paul could see the world that needed to be impacted. In Romans, he was deeply moved on behalf of his own people, the Jews, who had largely rejected Christ for that time.

Paul could also see already how God had impacted Asia Minor, the land Paul visited on each of his three missionary journeys.

As he wrote the letter to the church in Rome, Paul was thinking about coming to see them, to see what impact God would have through him there, and then going on to Spain where the Good News about Jesus still needed to be preached. Paul could see it all!

Like Paul, we are called to impact the unreached world where 3.1 billion people have no access to the Gospel.

This church has always been dedicated wholeheartedly to the mission to reach a lost world.

Rather than going to places that have easy access to the Gospel, our church is dedicated to sending missionaries, teams, and resources to places with very little access to the Gospel.

We are even more tightly focused on reaching unreached people groups in the Muslim world. Most Muslim people in the world are eager to know God and hope to live righteous lives. Can you imagine if we could help them to see that Jesus is the way to God? Can you imagine how that could change the world?

We are called to impact Hartford and Litchfield Counties where 900,000 of our neighbors are lost.

From the very beginning, our church has been focused on reaching out to our neighbors.

We recognized from the start that it would not be easy; the people of our region are successful, independent, and self-reliant. Helping them to realize that they need God is not always easy.

However, we have reached out, we've opened our homes, proclaimed the truth, planted new churches, and opened new campuses. We have a passion for the people of Hartford and Litchfield Counties; we want them to know Christ.

We are called to impact the next generation of young adults, students, and children.

We won't get very far if we forget our young people. They desperately need Jesus.

This church has always valued children, students, and young adults.

The pressures that our children, teenagers, and young adults face today are more profound than ever.

We must serve them. We must value and prioritize them. We must share the Good News about Jesus with them, and we must give them our very best effort and resources.

How will God use you to impact our world for Christ?

I'm talking about the dreams we have together.

God has called us as a church to the world, to our neighbors, and to the next generation.

However, the real genius behind Valley is that God has called you. Individually.

The calling God has given to you is probably bigger than I can understand or articulate.

If we stifle that dream or try to rein you in, then the Kingdom of God will be missing out on something bigger, better, and more worthy of celebration that you will do.

You are the one God has chosen to use. How will God use you to impact the world for Christ?
Let the rest of us equip you, pray with you, and then cheer your results.

GOD HAS **SENT** US TO IMPACT OUR WORLD FOR CHRIST

Again, in Romans 10:13-15, Paul clarified that God has sent someone to impact the world for Christ!

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

The answer to each of Paul's questions is clear.

How will they call on Jesus if they haven't believed in him? They can't.

How will they believe in Jesus if they've never heard about him? They won't.

How will they hear about Jesus if someone doesn't tell them? It will never happen!

How will someone tell them about Jesus unless we send those people out?

God IS sending us out to impact our world for Christ.

As we celebrate our 45th anniversary, we are starting our Next 45 years of ministry together.

It's good to celebrate what God has done in us and through us in the past 45 years.

The more important question, though, is, What happens next?

What will we do with the next 45 years that are starting right now?

As our founding generation has been handing this church to us, will we continue to impact our world for Christ?

As we receive the first 45 years of our history as a gift, will we own what God is doing here? Will we step into the gap, keep the work going, and do even greater things?

This is our moment, our very odd moment in history.

So many things have changed in the past 18 months.

God is not surprised by anything that has happened to us or around us. God isn't surprised by the pandemic, nor is he surprised by people's responses or by the changes that have happened in our society.

God did not make a mistake by putting us in this moment in history, nor did God make a mistake by putting us TOGETHER at this moment in history.

As odd as this moment may be, this is OUR MOMENT, the day the Lord has given to us.

I will spend this moment equipping you to IMPACT the world for Christ.

I will do everything I can to preach the Word of God and to teach you everything I know about making and multiplying disciples.

I will give you every tool I can find that will help you to IMPACT the world for Christ.

I will do everything I can to equip you to IMPACT the world for Christ. That's what I will do with this moment we have been given.

What will you do with this moment God has entrusted to you?

May that question resonate in your heart as we start the Next 45.

Answering that question is how we'll bring our vision to life in this new day.

May God use your "beautiful feet" to IMPACT the world for Christ.