

Sermon Text for August 14, 2022

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 56:10-11, Lamentations 3:22-24 *“Great is thy faithfulness”*

Some weeks back I married my niece off, I think I mentioned it to you. It was a bilingual service so everything that I said in English I waited until the translator would relay it to the congregation in Spanish. We got into a bit of a rhythm during my sermon so it was kind of fun. My niece had asked that I made a very clear statement about the Gospel and the need for each person to have a relationship with Jesus Christ, so I put a little extra time into making sure that I was concise and to the point. I had a line where I said: no one here makes a decision in a vacuum, meaning we all use some sort of guidance or compass to align ourselves when we make our decisions. None of our decisions come out of nowhere. I know enough Spanish to pretty much understand everything, but speaking is another matter.

So, I drove home the point and said: none of us make decision in a vacuum, out of nothing. I paused waited for the translator and what I heard her say in Spanish was none of us makes a decision with a vacuum cleaner. Yeah, words don't always help, in fact at times they can get in the way of manifesting the glory of God. Sometimes words help the witness, and other times they hurt the witness. Our lives, well, the same can be said. Our lives, how we live them, are the real witness.

And there is one element of our lives that really compromises our witness, even more so than a word translated literally that doesn't make any sense, and that is fear. When we live our lives in fear that is evident and visible to those around us and it compromises our witness. What are some things that cause you fear today? If you have kids you want to be sure your kids are safe. As you get older your health can be a source of fear as things change in our bodies. As we make big decisions in our lives to either retire or stay at home with the kids or whatever it may be, that fear can rear its ugly head. Making ends meet each month, how are we going to do that? Fear often manifests itself because the results of the future are so unknown.

But Scripture tells us over and over again, today included in a couple of different places, that God is faithful, that his steadfast love endures forever. If we really know that, if we really trust that, then we can face tomorrow. Let's read.

READ

One of the times in my life that I was most afraid was when I received a phone call from the school when Rachel was in 1st grade. The voice on the phone said that Rachel had had a

seizure and that an ambulance was on the way and would I meet it at school. On my way over I called Stacy and both of us were emotional messes, she couldn't come because she didn't have a car and when I got there Rachel was sitting up on a stretcher inside the ambulance. She was fine, she had passed out because a kid had mistakenly impaled himself in the hand with a pencil and that was too much for her. She's a fainter we found out, but no seizure, so she was and is fine. But that drive from the church to her school was the longest in my life. All the possibilities of what might happen flashed through my mind and 99.9% of them were negative.

As I look out at you I know that you can each name off much scarier times in your own life when things have happened that have made you consider the worst case scenarios and it almost leaves you paralyzed. You have faced death of loved ones, critical financial situations, addiction, broken relationships and marriages, and the list goes on. In our first reading today David was facing one of those moments in his life where his future was more than uncertain, it was absolutely compromised.

If you look at the beginning of Psalm 56 you will read that it is a Psalm that is to be sung to the tune: The Dove on far off Terebinths. I love that tune, it sounds a lot like Abba's Dancing Queen. Okay, that's not true, we don't know what the tune is, but the next line, we do know something about that. When the Philistines seized him in Gath. That takes place in I Samuel 21:11 and it is a time in his life when he is captured by the Philistines, his arch enemies, and they are on the verge of deciding his fate. In the midst of this precarious time, scary time, one where fear could grip and paralyze him, he says this: I am not afraid.

I am not afraid, and why is he not afraid? Look at the verses before that. He lays out the foundation as to why he is not afraid. You know kids close their eyes when they face something that is frightening and they hope that when they close their eyes either someone won't see them, or that which is scary for them would just kind of disappear because they aren't looking at it. David doesn't do that, he faces his fear, his enemy, face on, he lists the faithfulness of God, he lays out for himself the foundation that makes him unafraid.

In God I trust, I praise his Word, what can a mere mortal do to me when I trust in God and when I rely upon the promises that are found in his Word? Folks, this is why we read Scripture together because we then can say at a certain point in our lives, you know, what, you can throw anything that you want at me world, but I trust in God, I know that his Scripture contains promises for me that I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, in the here and now. I praise his Word because it gives me those promises upon which I can place my trust.

If we know God's word, then we can know his promises which include the steadfast love and eternal faithfulness of the Lord. If we don't know Scripture then we are making decisions in our life in a vacuum and that is pretty shaky ground to go on for our future. What can mortals, what can Philistines do to me when I trust in God, David says. It sounds like Romans 8:38 "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. That's the promise of God's word, if we would only read it and believe it.

The love that God has for us ought to create in us a fearlessness for the future. It doesn't mean you don't care, it just means that you trust in God so much that your decisions are not made out of fear. Remember what we read in I John 4:18 – There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. It is possible to remember the great faithfulness of God and to live your life without fear, it is possible.

When we get to Lamentations we read a similar truth given to us from the prophet Jeremiah. Lamentations is again another reflection, another Scripture where a person of faith, like David before the Philistines, is facing the most difficult scariest time of his life. Lamentations was written by our friend Jeremiah at a time when the city of Jerusalem is surrounded by the Babylonians and they have blockades set up so that the city is starving. Jeremiah is in Jerusalem watching the horrors of starvation before him as this siege takes place. Including, look at vs.20 "should women eat their offspring." The horrors of war and famine were manifesting themselves completely and Jeremiah was in the midst of that. Can you think of anything worse?

The verses we read, from which the hymn Great is Thy Faithfulness come which we will be singing after this, they follow Jeremiah saying in vs.2: "He has driven and brought me into darkness without any light." Things are as bad as they are going to get. And while Jeremiah as a whole is a call for God's mercy we see that it is hard to find at this time. Until we get to the verses that we read this morning. Look at vs.21 which sets up our verses. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope. In the midst of the horrors that I am experience, I bring to my mind the nature of God. I remember the promises that I have read in Scripture. I think back on my own life experiences where God has been faithful day after day, morning after morning, and vs.21 states, and therefore I have hope.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning, great is thy faithfulness. In the midst of this I remind myself of God's

steadfast love, in the midst of our children's future being uncertain we know that his mercies never come to an end, in the midst of our financial uncertainties every morning we see the faithfulness of God as we take a breath. You can fill in your own fear, you can place your own uncertainties in these blanks and be able to say – even as I face a declining health that is impacting my quality of life, I know from Scripture the promises that I have, which is Great is your faithfulness, and so as a result I can say like Jeremiah did in vs. 24, I will hope in him.

Fear is a great distraction from our focusing on God. So much can happen in our lives that distract us from the love of God. But Bob, you don't understand what I'm going through. Well, maybe, maybe not, but what I do understand is that Scripture promises us that even as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we are told that we do not have to fear evil, but God's rod and his staff, well, they are there to comfort us. Every single morning the presence of the Lord is new and that presence produces mercies that never, ever come to an end.

We need to be reminded of that periodically. If you do not have a relationship with Jesus that is personal, then my guess is that your life could be highlighted extensively with times of fear and uncertainty. Loving and knowing Jesus doesn't take away the tragedy and the horror, but it does provide hope and eliminate fear as we reflect on the faithfulness of God. Amen.