

Sermon Text for August 31, 2014

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Esther 5:9-14, James 4:13-17

“Making our own plans”

This week seemed to be one of the more emotional weeks in recent memory. How was your week? We said goodbye to Keri as we celebrated her resurrection on Monday. That was hard emotionally and continues to be. Tuesday I took the day off to take Rachel to college. We had no idea what to expect, we've never done this before. We didn't know how long we were supposed to stay. They had group activities for both the parents and the students, but separately. We skipped out on the parent activities so we could stalk Rachel as she made her way around campus, with us hiding behind trees trying to catch a glimpse, yeah, I know, we need a life.

We were able to get her attention so we hurriedly said goodbye, hugged her, now tears and headed back by ourselves to the parking lot. As we made our way Stacy stopped and said: “that did not go at all as I had envisioned, not at all as I had planned.” Let's go say goodbye again, we hadn't finished her room, we didn't even pray with her or anything like that. We called her, she came back down, we spent two more quality hours with her, finished her room. Then we all went to the parking lot where we all lost it. We were in a wet sobbing huddle praying for God's grace and protection over her. Now that was more like it, just as we planned, and really blessed by God.

Today we come to a culmination of weeks of you discerning how God just might want to use you in His plans through this church. I got this quote from one of you this week: “When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left and could say I used everything you gave me.”

I asked you to be in prayer to discern what God has in store for you here so that His plans are your plans. When we make our plans God has to be at the ground level. Both of our Scriptures today remind us of how important it is for God to be the origination point of our plans and not the one who gets to see them after they've been all done. Let's see how our plans and making our plans can match up with God's plans.

I was listening to NPR the other day and I heard an interview with an actor who made it big. He said he graduated from high school a year so that at 17 he could pack up his car and go to Hollywood by himself to break into the acting world. At the end of that final school year one of his teachers was mortified and said what is your plan B, what if it doesn't work out and then proceeded to try to convince him to stay and follow the more traditional path.

His mother was furious and went to the school the next day and confronted the teacher and said: what is your plan B if this doesn't work out for you? Do any of you have plan B's if things just don't work out for you? I'm a pastor, I don't have a plan B. If all the churches in the world close, I'm going to need a plan B. What about you? You're a farmer, you're a mechanic, you work in industry, and we can go down the line. What are your plan B's if things don't work out for you? We don't have them because at the core of who we are is a confidence that it is who God wants us to be. We don't have a plan B because we believe that plan A is God's plan.

Haman, in our first Scripture also didn't have a plan B because he was absolutely convinced that his plans were going to be the same plans as the king. He was so pleased with himself, the king considered him important. Even the queen thought he was special. They had bestowed honor upon honor on him. He was at the height of his career. But it wasn't enough because his archenemy didn't fear him. Even though he had everything he could ever want it wasn't enough because his enemy was also happy. He couldn't be happy unless his enemy was unhappy, or better yet, dead.

So he made a plan, it was a good plan. Let's make a gallows 6 stories tall so anyone in the kingdom can see it and then his enemy will tremble knowing that it was meant for him. He liked the plan, his friends liked the plan, even his wife signed off on the plan. But God's plan was to use that same gallows to hang Haman. He took what was meant for evil and used it so that the enemy of God's people, Haman, could be destroyed. When our plans don't match up with God's plans, God will normally win and even use our plans against us.

So often we are guilty of what can be called practical atheism. Stay with me here. We are just cruising in life, things are clicking as they should be, no huge ups and downs, things are happening as we have planned, no big events to celebrate or mourn. Everything is great because there are no surprises. There really is no need to get God's in put because we aren't asking for anything special. We plan and once everything is all set up we may ask God to bless it as we move forward on this venture, whatever it may be. But God was never part of the planning, certainly not at the ground level. This is called practical atheism, God is only present, and God is only recognized as being present when we really need him or after everything has already been decided by us. That atheism changes very quickly once things start going awry, we become believers then, but not necessarily in the plans.

Before you change jobs, or leave your spouse, or buy that house, or join that church or whatever it may be don't let your practicality get in God's way of being involved. But some things just work on their own, you say. That's a practical atheist speaking there. Nothing works without God making it work and James tells us today we had better recognize that.

In verse 13 he is addressing merchants who would go to fledgling cities and live there for a year or so and make really good money because they got in on the ground level before anyone else did. He had no problem with that. The Jewish people of the 1st century were known to be amazing businessmen and the merchant class was very well known in their community. What he is doing is speaking a language that they understood. Before I moved here I had no idea that corn was harvested in September, but now I can speak your language. In James' community it was merchants, in fact the Gospel spread like wildfire because of merchants like the Apostle Paul who was a leather merchant. So he is not slamming people who are successful or who are merchants.

He does remind us that with success comes the temptation to take the credit. This is a reminder that often our plans when we have success can be laced with pride as we forget that ultimately God is in control of all things in our life. That is what James wants us to remember as we make our plans.

Do we need to be reminded again this week of how fleeting our success is and how our plans really mount to nothing when held up to the Eternal Creator who made heaven and earth? Verse 14 tells us that we are but a mist that will disappear when the sun rises. We do not know what tomorrow will bring, not a single one of us.

Robert Burns the English poet was a farmer and while he was plowing his field one day he turned over the house of a field mouse, and as a result wrote a poem about the event. One line states: The best laid schemes of mice and men, gang aft agley. It means, the best laid plans that any of us make can be turned upside down. Verse 14 tells us we don't know what tomorrow will bring. It could turn our life upside down.

James moves in verse 15 with an attempt to give us something very pragmatic as to how to remind ourselves that God is in control. He tells us that even in our speech we ought to end every sentence with: If God wills it. Now, this used to be taken literally not too long ago when people would end their letters with the initials DV, which stood for in latin: Deo Volente which means God willing. The purpose is to remind us as Thomas A Kempis stated: Man proposed but God disposes.

The LMH tennis team started their season this year. Their number 3 player is a girl from the Ukraine. I got a chance to meet her mom and dad and they are back in Ukraine now, 30 miles away from the Russian border. Before he left he told me that if it wasn't for the United States Russia would have already invaded Ukraine, because Europe cared too much for its gas to do anything about it. That was about 10 days ago.

From one week to the next we never know what will happen. But make no mistake, I know Russia, this has the potential of throwing all of us into a war the likes of which only Paul Lefever and a few of you have ever seen. How would your life change if your teenage son had to report for duty, even if he was in college? Or our youth pastor, or your husband. How would our lives change forever?

This is exactly what James wants us to think about and to be aware of. Only by the grace of God are we able to do anything. He is the architect and we are just the hired contractors who have been bought by the blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. Only those who allow Jesus to be the Lord of their lives, of every single nook and cranny, of every single joy and sorrow, can be prepared for tomorrow.

This takes us to Vocation Sunday. We have seen in James that the plans that we make have to have our Savior as their beginning and end. We should do nothing without beseeching His presence in prayer. As we make our way through this life James in vs. 17 tells us what is not an option.

Doing nothing is not an option. If we know that we ought to be doing something and we are doing nothing he calls it a sin. What is your plan for contributing to the kingdom of God here on this earth through FPC? But please, don't do it because you have to. Don't join a committee begrudgingly because you've been guilted into it. Reach out in love because you want to, you can't wait to see how God's plan for your life involves using up all of your talents till there are no more left.

Take out that card that is in your bulletin. Put your name on it and put the date on it. If you know how you want God to use you, let us know. Some of you may not be too familiar with ways of getting involved, here are some:

Volunteer in the office, teach Sunday School, help in the nursery, volunteer in the preschool, help with the foodbank, ask Brett how you can minister to the boys on bikes, get involved in the housing project that is starting up, volunteer to help with our own housing project called New Beginning as they look for a new family, serve as a church officer, sing in the choir, play in the band, take on a section of the church property as your own and pick weeds there and make it beautiful, pray for your pastor, help with the youth group, start a program where we throw showers for those families expecting children, create your own project, pray for a specific program, speak to me about other opportunities.

There are a myriad of ways to get involved that will help the life of the church. Make sure you figure out God's plans. Amen.