

Sermon Text for September 28, 2014

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 32, James 5:19-20
“This is what it is all about”

We had a great week at the fair. It really is the place to go to see anyone and everyone. We had a great table this year. Kids stopped by and we really had something to give them between the candy, the bracelet, the bag, and a pen, a notepad and a Bible. My system was to go down the ladder and they would say yes to everything so when you got to the Bible they're on a roll and they say yes to that as well. This 7 or 8 year old came by and we went down the ladder and got to the Bible and he said, does it have prayers? I hesitated but then I said yes, of course, turned to Matthew and said what about his one: Our Father, his eyes lit up and he said, I love that one and took it and ran off to show him mom. It was a great fair moment.

Then there was the high school student with his dad, a tall good looking kid and he had a McCaskey sweatshirt on with his name on the back, really looked like an athlete. On the front was McCaskey bobsled with the image of a bobsled on the front. So I asked them, is there really a bobsled team at McCaskey? He looked at me and said if you were my age I would mess with you and tell you that we practice near Harrisburg. He said he's had people wanting to sign up and one kid who said oh year, I've been to that place. No, you actually haven't because it doesn't exist. It was a real neat moment.

The opportunities we have to get the name of Jesus Christ out into the community so that His name is lifted higher than any other name are so few and far in between and yet as a church isn't that what we are all about? All of our programs from PW to Fellowship to Outreach to Mission has to be about telling others about the love of Jesus Christ in the variety of ways that we tend to do it.

Our primary purpose is to share the joy and the love that comes with being a forgiven child of Jesus Christ. Both of our Scriptures today address what it looks like when a person is brought back into the fold when they are welcomed back into the family by someone who actually takes the time to care less about themselves and more about the person who had wandered away from God.

James goes from telling us that what we believe has to be reflected in how we live which includes how do we embrace those who have been forgiven, those who were a part of our family and former members of FPC who just aren't around any longer. Do we let them go, take them off our list and save a couple thousand dollars or do we make it our mission to go out of our way

to visit them and bring them back into the fold, leaving no one behind. Maybe it is easier to reach out to those we don't know at the fair than to those we do know who maybe don't come around anymore. Let's read.

Wilberforce the great abolitionist who was known for his tireless work to end the slave trade was once asked if he knew whether he was saved or not, if he knew if his soul had been redeemed. He responded by saying: "Madame, I have been so busy trying to save the souls of others that I have no time to think of my own." Statements like these would drive an evangelical crazy because there is nothing more important than our relationship with Jesus or the state of our soul. But James, our beloved James, would celebrate and say but we know the state of our soul by how we bring others to Christ, with how we treat and interact with others. Remember this quote as it really defines what James has been telling us for this entire time, he's been telling us this is what it is all about, and especially today as we look at those who have worked hard to save the souls of others.

It is hard to believe that we have only been in James since March of this year, it seems so much longer, but you can now say that you have been subjected to a sermon series where the entire Gospel of John has been covered as well as the Epistle of James. As you saw, next week we will be covering the Apostles' Creed, which while it is not Scripture, we will be covering some very basic fundamental Scriptures to understand what we really believe. But before we get to James today, let's cover Psalm 32. Psalm 32 is a Psalm of David that recounts his return back to the fold under the Lordship of Almighty God. We know his story. He wandered away from the Lord by assaulting Bathsheeba by forcing her to his side by using his power as king. And then distanced himself even more by plotting and carrying out the death of her husband.

He is brought back to God by Nathan, the prophet of the Lord, who lets him know that you can be reconciled, but there is a cost. Psalm 32 reflects the joy that comes with forgiveness. Happy are those whose sin is forgiven. The death of Absalom is the price that is paid, a tragedy that strikes the house of David, but the reconciliation between this king David and God is celebrated, all because a person called him out and brought him closer to the Lord. Before this we find in verse 3 while I was silent, I wasted away. No step back and recognition of our sin, brings about misery. But a renewed relationship brings about joy. It is all about, for David at least, being glad in the Lord after being brought back to the fold.

There are so many Scriptures that speak to what it is all about in bringing people back into the fold. You know the parable of the lost sheep, turn to Matthew 18, you see that little space in the margins, some manuscripts read: For the Son of Man came to save the lost. Jesus

came to bring us back into the fold. This is what it is all about. Jesus came to save us, the lost. This is what it is all about, the basic most fundamental truth that we face is that God wants us back into his fold. What that happens there is a great celebration.

In James, let's turn there now, in verse 19 we read about those who have wandered from the truth. When you wander away from a group, it's not like you make a conscious decision to wander, it just kind of happens. When we were in Israel we had one who would wander and once it was serious enough that I sent the group on ahead and I stayed looking for her. When I found her she was so filled with joy and thanksgiving.

But back in James' community people would wander away from the church mostly because they couldn't take the heat. To be a Christian meant deciding in matters of life and death. So they would wander from the truth, from Jesus because the stakes were too high. People in our culture don't leave the church because the stakes are too high. They leave the church because they don't want to be surrounded by hypocrites. That's the truth.

But what James establishes here is a real practical step for us as a church to take for those who have left the family. He points to the person who is able to bring them back into the fold there are rewards that exceed our greatest expectations. So James is talking about sinners who turn their back on God, a member of that body reaches out to them and brings them back.

Proverbs tells us that love covers a multitude of sins. I Peter 4:8 tells us that we have to maintain constant love for each other because love covers a multitude of sins. Luther stated that it was of benefit to both the converted and the one converting. Daniel tells us that if we lead others to righteousness our stars will shine forever and ever. Galatians tells us to lead people back into the fold with all gentleness.

James very clearly is speaking of those who have wandered from the truth, from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He reminds us of who has the responsibility of bringing them back into the fold? He doesn't mention that it is up to outreach, or the cookie bombers. Let's be clear that James is setting up a reality where the humblest of Christians accepted the responsibility of witnessing to the Gospel to their neighbors. It wasn't the attractive programs of the church, it wasn't the worship or the sermon series that seemed to last forever, or the Ephrata choir. It was the people, those in the pews who determined to bring back those who had wandered.

Let's make sure we are applying accurately what James is telling us today. He is speaking of sinners who have wandered away from the truth. I'm sure there are plenty of those around us although what we face as a church is similar, but very different in a fundamental way.

We have dozens of families who over the years have wandered from the church and most of them for good reason. The church was a place of strife and contention and so who wants to raise a family in that poisonous environment.

I think we can humbly but accurately say that the poison of the past is no longer part of the present. Those who wandered away from their church home didn't necessarily wander from the truth, or even from a relationship with Jesus Christ, just from a relationship with us, away from a conflict. It is time for each one of us to reach out to their neighbor to welcome them back into the fold.

This is part of what it is all about for James. Yes, he is talking about bringing people back to a loving relationship with Jesus Christ just as we were brought back, but why not apply it to what is our not so distant past? Being here today is not about sitting in the pew and receiving but rather putting our faith to work. Do we love this church and see it as a place where Jesus Christ is preached and where the authority of Scripture is respected above any other cultural authority or standard? Then we should tell someone about it.

It is all about saving others and making this church a place where others can call home even if it is at the expense of those things we hold dear. The more we are concerned about our own souls or our things or our way of doing things, or our pride because it just doesn't seem like some members take seriously what it means to be a member of the church, then the less we will be concerned about others and their need to know Jesus.

The programs we offer have to be less about what we want and more about what will reach others. It is all about saving others so we lose track of our ourselves. Amen.