

Sermon Text for July 5, 2015

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Matthew 26:26-30, Genesis 9:8-17

“The survivor”

Well, happy 4th of July weekend. I hope you enjoyed some family time, and also some time to reflect upon what a privilege it is to be a citizen of this country that celebrated it's nearly 240 years of independence. I remember the first time that I came to the United States that I could remember, I was 8 and it was 1976 and I remember the celebrations. It was quite overwhelming and it helped, just a little bit, to ease the pain of having to leave all my friends behind. But we also arrived in Ventnor, NJ right after a terrible hurricane that has lifted up the boardwalk and neighbors were sweeping their sidewalks to get the sand from the beach off. I remember thinking that our forefathers and these people were survivors, who could make it through just about anything.

When I think of survivors I think of my father. I remember the year when we brought him a cake with candles on it and Naomi and Rachel helped him blow out the candles. You see my father had Alzheimers for the last 13 years of his life. Each person suffering from Alzheimer's is different I've noticed. Some are very quiet, others can't wait to see someone new, everyone is new to them, so that they can tell them what they used to do when they were younger. My girls always would get a lot of attention when they went to visit him because they inevitably found themselves on somebody's lap at the community hearing tales of the old country or something similar. That year that we brought the cake I hadn't heard my father say a full sentence in over a year after we had wheeled him out to the duck pond and the kids were playing he had a moment of clarity and he smiled and said: Isn't this fun? It made my week, month, even year. My father was a survivor and he allowed me to appreciate every moment that I live as a grace filled moment. Every moment is one that we need to know that we are blessed to be able to live on this earth and enjoy the creation that God has given us and the life that God has given us.

A young woman in our Florida church who had just lost a 2 year old told me after the funeral as she watched then 4 year old Rachel play with 2 year old Naomi: Bob, enjoy those kids of yours. Don't ever take a second for granted, make sure you enjoy every moment. The survivors of tragedies, those who are left behind are always more appreciative of the future and the role that God plays in their lives.

Today, brothers and sisters we are going to learn how to be a survivor. Today we are going to learn about a true survivor and what his reaction to his survival is. Noah is someone whom we have seen over these last two weeks **has obeyed God, and therefore was considered righteous, was remembered by God and so was saved**, and now this week we will see him as the survivor and how we also are to live our lives as survivors, acknowledging that every moment of our life needs to be a grace filled moment.

An aspect of life in Russia that you get used to very quickly is knowing that contracts are never honored. We signed a lease on an apartment once to allow 5 of our immigrant young men a place to live so that they would not be homeless, with the owner fully aware of what we were doing, they went to move in and the owner told them that he had rented it to someone who had paid more, even after the contract was signed and the keys were handed over. Contracts, covenants, aren't always respected.

Today our Scripture is all about covenants and promises that God makes with us and with all of his creation that it gets me. Could you imagine God getting bored and saying, well maybe I don't have to follow through with the covenant I made with Noah and maybe I will destroy all of humanity again. That is what we do with each other, aren't you glad that God doesn't treat us the same way we treat each other?

Today we are going to look at this covenant that God made with Noah. Just so we know that we are on the same page to begin with, a covenant is an agreement or a commitment that is made with two or more people. Usually there is a sign of this covenant that is made and it is a visible sign so that people can't forget this covenant and it will be visible for all people. A marriage between a man and a woman is a common covenant that is made these days and the visible sign of marriage is: that's right the ring. The ring is a visible sign to all people that hey, I'm taken. This is an example of a covenant that we can all relate to.

Today we see the covenant that God makes with Noah and with all of creation and the sign of this covenant is that of the rainbow. Every time that we see that rainbow we should hear God say No more. Never again will I destroy you, because I love you too much. We read about the no mas covenant that God makes with Noah. It is God's promise that never again would God destroy humanity, every time we see a rainbow we hear God's covenant, God's promise, no more, never again.

The rains have come and gone, Noah and his family get out of the ark. Can you imagine the scene when those doors to the ark opened. If you were in the wrong place at

the wrong time then you would not have know what had hit you. With the opening of those doors all of creation that had been salvaged, all of the survivors flooded out onto the earth. You know that feeling that you get after you've flown for 12 hours and the plane finally touches down and inevitably there is one person that claps and the whole plane would be in a standing ovation if they let you out of that little seat belt that is supposed to protect you from a 30,000 foot crash from out of the sky. Well remember that feeling and multiply it exponentially. They were on that boat for nearly a year once all the waters had settled.

If you have been reading Genesis along with me you would have seen that the first thing that Noah does when he gets off the boat is build an altar to thank God for God's protection. Noah is so thankful for being the survivor. He actually made it through everything that had happened over these years: the building of the ark, the humiliation and ridicule from his friends and neighbors, the closed quarters with all of creation. Do you think Noah appreciated what it meant to be a survivor. Do you think that Noah's life was changed from the opening of those doors on? Noah must have realized that every moment of his life was a moment of grace.

Most of us haven't been through what Noah went through. Most of us don't have that survivor instinct and appreciation of God that we ought to have. We haven't sacrificed our life and our family in order to love God. We haven't known that God has chosen us, each one of us personally to be his children, to save from the floods of this world. Do we? We are God's survivors. Can you imagine how different your life would be if you had been through what Noah has just been through. Imagine you are the only survivor and God chose you to carry out God's plans on this earth, nobody else around. I know that if we lived our lives with this outlook then we would live every moment as grace filled moments.

As soon as Noah gets off the boat he builds an altar. God then in turn blesses Noah and states in our Scripture: As for me, or my part of the bargain is: When you hear God say as for me then you should hang on because something really big and important is coming. As for me, God states, I am going to establish my covenant with you that never again will I destroy you or my creation. As we mentioned earlier the rainbow serves as proof to us and all of creation and future generations that we can know God's amazing steadfast love for us and so that we would know for certainty God's unconditional love for us.

When we celebrate communion together as brothers and sisters in Christ we celebrate a covenant that God would never go back on. It is not a covenant made between God and the Presbyterian Church, or the Methodist Church, or the Lutheran Church and so we each in our little corner go off and have our own little moment. No, it is a covenant like the rainbow in the sky that we are all called to celebrate together, as Christ prayed that they may all be one. It is a moment to be shared by all survivors who are disciples of Jesus Christ. It is a covenant that our Lord Jesus Christ left for us so that we would live every moment of our lives as grace filled moments. This covenant has a sign just like Noah, and marriage. The sign is that of the bread and the cup. Just like Noah's covenant it is proof of God's amazing love for all of humanity and creation and not just one family or one group of people. In this covenant God states again never again, once and for all times Jesus died for our sins and that is sufficient for us. Nobody else has to do anything to ratify the agreement because it has been ratified in heaven. By sending his Son Jesus Christ on this earth, God made a promise to us, God told us that we have access to eternal life through him.

We need to see ourselves as survivors, as people who have been chosen individually by God, as people who realize that every moment of our lives needs to be moments of grace filled existence because of God's amazing sacrifice for us. Let us recognize that we are survivors, that we rely upon Christ for all things, even our very existence. Amen.