

Sermon Text for December 11, 2016

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Daniel 9:3-10, Romans 1:8-15
“Praying focused on God”

Sometimes when Sunday is the only day that you have contact with the church it is hard to recognize what is happening in the life of the church outside of what happens on Sunday. Let me give you a bit of an overview on what is happening in the life of the church. This past Wednesday we had Clubhouse, what a team of workers we have for that program. We broke the 40 child barrier, with three classes and a nursery. I don't know if you've noticed that on Sunday mornings we are getting a good crew together and children's church is producing a great alternative for kids 1st grade through 5th grade. I think we had over 25 children who came up for the children's sermon between the two services last week.

At our congregational meeting last year you were presented with and received a budget that was just barely over a 1% increase from this year. You are very, very good stewards of that which God provides us in our families and in our church. You elected your church officers. Just so you can know who they are, if you are here today and I call your name please stand: As Trustees you elected into office: as Trustee – Dick Barge, Raymond Reinmiller, Jeff McComsey, Jane Geiger, and Todd Allison. As Deacon you elected Pat Hess, Phyllis and Peter Witmer, Erica Reinmiller, Kathy Barge, and two youth deacons of AJ Petrokonis and Morgan Murphy. As elders you elected Emily Welk, Michael Carle, Andrea Petrokonis for full 3 year terms and Pam Johnson to a one year term.

It's been a good week. But we find ourselves here again together on the third Sunday in Advent looking at our theme of prayer. How has your week been, have you prayed every day for 5 minutes? Did you ask this past week for God not so much to do something, as much as give you a revelation on how you ought to pray? This week we approach prayer looking at Calvin's third point, and still focusing on Romans chapter 1. Remember his four points: 1 – Find a quiet time and place to pray without distraction. We said, pray for 5 minutes. 2 – Pray for what you need, and our homework was to pray asking God to reveal to us what his desire in our life might be. 3 – Relinquish all

confidence in ourselves when we pray, or as the sermon title reflects, pray focused on God. Or to say it in words we can understand: to God be the glory.

We are told today that one of the most important characteristics that a child needs is self-confidence. Parents are told to continually shower their children with praise because their self-esteem is crucial to their development. Culture shows us TV and movies where people's sense of worth is dictated by their bodies, their perfect teeth, their wealth, their popularity. It is in these things that we are to have our confidence. These very tentative, superficial toys are what make life worth living. The size of our house, the type of car that we drive, the status symbols that we like to wave in front of others who might not have what we have. Culture tells us that our confidence ought to reside in what we have and our definition of ourselves ought to be shaped by that as well.

When I was in high school, an inner city high school that was considered filled with needy kids and kids who needed to be told that they were important, Jesse Jackson came and told us that you are somebody. Part of being a member of this family is a sense of being connected to something that is far larger than we are. This is important.

But if culture insists that our value is based upon our feelings of being worth something, our faith tells us that our value is based upon not what we have or don't have, it is not based upon our current state of mind, it is based upon Jesus Christ who gives us all the value that we need. Our self-confidence should not come from ourselves but rather from Christ. I am not saying that we do not need to be confident, we do, but our confidence does not come from ourselves, but from Christ.

Calvin states that the knowledge of God must begin with an understanding of who we are. If our relationship with God is only as deep and intimate as our prayer time with God is then our understanding of who we are in respect to God will have an impact on how we communicate or pray to our God. What does Scripture tell us concerning who we are in respect to God. The good news first. Genesis 1:27 tells us: So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them male and female he created them. Who are we in respect to God? We are made in God's image.

But then Scripture departs from allowing us to place any confidence in ourselves and this is an essential part in being able to approach God as we ought to. The first step in prayer after you've found the time and place, you've identified your need, you need to

realize that without God, we have no chance. All glory needs to belong to God. We are nobody in relation to God, we are merely God's creation. Let's look at some of those Scriptures.

The first is our Daniel Scripture that begins with the prophet turning to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. Daniel's understanding is that he is to make himself so lowly before God that he recognizes as he states later we have sinned and done wrong. Throughout Scripture we find people of faith bowed, on their knees, prostrate to the ground, no place do you see them with face exalted, hands up lifted because there was the understanding that worship is about God first and foremost, it is not about us. Likewise, prayer is first and foremost about God, and not about us.

I know that we are talking about prayer, but can we take a step into worship. So often we judge a worship in regards to how do I feel when I leave the sanctuary. If we sang hymns that I know, or if the sermon was good, or at least funny, then I feel good and it was a good worship. That's not how we judge worship, because it has nothing to do with us, nothing to do with how we feel, it has to do with: Was God glorified? In our individualistic culture we define the success of anything, even our worship, with how we feel about it, how does it interact with me, as opposed to how do we offer it up to God.

Still in Daniel verses 18 and 19 state this as the prophet says: We do not present our supplications before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercy. Nehemiah 1:4 is similar as the prophet states I mourned for days fasting and praying before God and then he states both I and my family have sinned. Psalm 143:2 the psalmist states no one living is righteous before you. That sounds a lot like Romans 4 as Paul states that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Isaiah 64:5-9 the prophet states that our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. Yet, you are our potter and we are the clay. This is the understanding of who we are in respect to God. He is the potter and we are the clay. This is the understanding we need to have in prayer.

When Paul begins in Romans he states first and foremost that all things work through Jesus Christ the Lord and Savior. Our prayer needs to be focused and concentrated first and foremost on Jesus Christ. Matthew 6 is understood as the prayer

verses that give us direction and guidance in our prayer life. When you pray, don't pray with your mind on those around you as if because of your words heaped up God will listen to you. No, go to your closet, by yourself and pray to your father. The focus is never on us, no the focus is always on God.

Have you noticed during your five minutes the amount of time you spend with a honey do list for God? I have another challenge. For this week spend these five minutes only telling God you are sorry for not being the person you ought to be, for thanking God for who God is first and foremost. Just spend this week recognizing who God is and who you are in respect to God. As James states in 4:10, humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and he will exalt you.

At the end of this week you will find yourself with such an overwhelming sense of self-confidence not because of who you are but because of who God is in your life. You will find that your worth doesn't come from being a great mom, or a great worker, or a great singer, or a good looker, or a successful businessman but rather from the living Savior who loved you so much that at the expense of his own life he gave it up so that you could take his place in having an intimate relationship with the father.

As the hymn goes when you turn your eyes upon Jesus and look full in his wonderful face then the things of this earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. Pray with confidence in Christ. Amen.