

# Sermon Text for May 28, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 89:1-4, Romans 5:18-21

*“Proud to be a Christian”*

I can't help but thank you enough for allowing me to spend a week in San Antonio listening to some of the greatest preachers in the country. There were 1,800 of us strong and I was told that it was the largest preachers conference in North America. All I can say is that I started attending in 2000 and there were probably about 3 or 400 of us. It has grown quite a bit. One grizzled, retired preacher, Walter Brugemann, called it theological Viagra. I'm not sure what he meant, but I think I got the gist of what he was trying to get across.

We find ourselves in the middle of Memorial Day Weekend. We go all out here at the church. We march in the parade with our church float, we serve up the community a free meal of hot dogs and drinks. For some reason this year I think it is especially meaningful and poignant for me. You see, in San Antonio on the way out there I was on the plane with a couple dozen teenagers who were heading to their basic training. These lives so full of promise and hope. It made me proud, to be honest, and it is a feeling that I don't often experience. It gave me a stark reminder that our nation takes its freedom very seriously, even at times at the cost of lives. There was a certain pride that always is present when we celebrate our nation's holidays. As that popular song states we are proud to be an American because at least we know we are free, and we display that pride with the flag, cook-outs, parades, and sunburns.

I think of the celebration of the birthday of the church that we are going to have next Sunday. We will all wear red on Pentecost, of course we won't have won't share a meal together, we won't have a parade. I've often wondered what would happen if we did show our pride to be Christians, believers in Jesus Christ, freedom fighters, so that everything that we did on that day had a touch of Christian to it, what if we were proud to be a Christian, what would our lives look like? And just for the record, the two are not the same. Being an American does not mean that you are Christian. The converse is also true. Jesus wasn't an American. There are many, many more Christians living outside of the United States than what we have here in America.

We find ourselves back in Romans where a few weeks ago we saw the proof of God's amazing love for us in Jesus Christ, while we were yet sinners, he died for us. This Memorial Day every church across the nation is going to talk about no greater love has one than to lay down His life for his friend and talk about those military men and women who laid down their lives for us. A couple weeks ago we had to choose between life and death, Jesus or sin. Last week we saw how God has called all people to

His side to be co-workers in His name. All people, men and women alike. This week once we know that God loves us and we have chosen to live under that love, what does a Christian life look like? Can we say that we are proud to be a Christian and can we live our life based upon that pride?

### **READ SCRIPTURE**

I will never forget 15 years ago I was playing basketball in a summer league and Jarvis Williams, who played for the Washington Redskins was on my team and it was coached by John L. Williams, who played for Seattle Seahawks and we were down 1 point with 10 seconds left, Jarvis Williams drove to the basket, passed it to me, and I missed a 10 footer to win the game at the buzzer. It was the championship game, and I still think about what I could have done differently. There is something about sports, I guess it is something that I picked up in college that when things don't go well, I stay up at night going through all the different scenarios of how I could have done things differently. I could have faked and driven to the basket. After that game Rachel came up to me and said, daddy, it is just a game.

Sometimes you do or say something and you just want to rewind the scene and try to do it all over again because you know the second time you would do it differently and it would turn out better. Paul tells us in Romans today that Christ undid, rewound the action of sin that Adam introduced into this world and Jesus took the necessary actions and steps to make it right. What Adam did, Christ undid, where Adam failed, Christ succeeded. As we live our lives as Christians we will find that more often than not it is easier to fail than it is to succeed. It is more likely that we will be ashamed to associate ourselves to Christ than to be proud to be a Christian.

There is a basic human truth and that is that it is easier to bring about death, than it is to bring life. Think about it. Life involves a whole assortment of variables that have to go exactly as God has it planned. Death can come about when just one of these simple variables goes awry. It takes 9 months and constant upkeep for years after that to produce a life. It only takes a fraction of a second to take a life

The same is true in nation building. For our nation it will always be much easier to win the war. But then to establish a democracy that the people want will be much more difficult, and it will involve many more lives at stake. This is what Paul is stating is so difficult about the Christian life. Christ has done everything, shown us his love for us, we have chosen to live according to that love, so now as we live we live trying to follow that example that Christ gives us. But sin in our lives will always increase. It is easier sometimes to sin, to not follow that which Christ commands us to do. But in vs. 20 Paul tells us that as our sin increases it doesn't mean that God loves us less, but rather that God has to wratchet it up a bit so that God's grace can overcome our sin and that his love for us will even more than overcompensate for the sin that we have.

For every act of sin that we commit, Christ responds with an even greater act of grace. So why should we be proud to be a Christian? Certainly not because of what we have done, just like some of us can be proud to be an American not because we have fought any wars, but rather because we associate ourselves to this country because we are its citizens. Likewise we are to be proud to be a Christian because of what Christ has done for us and when we call ourselves Christians we associate ourselves to what Christ has done for us. These verses in Romans show us that by our choice for Christ we have chosen to live lives that always reflect Christ. Not just here on Sunday, but every single day.

Paul ends by telling us that our lives ought to be an anticipation of that eternal life that is in Christ as we read in verse 21. Psalm 89 speaks about how the Israelites were able to be proud and secure in their acceptance by God because God promised them that all through the line of David they would be his people. We don't have that promise. God has promised us that all those who call upon the name of Jesus will be able to inherit eternal life.

In this country we often mesh together being a Christian and being an American, or being a patriot. But part of our problem as American Christians is that we have created an unsustainable exceptionalism which flies contrary to the command of Paul to rely upon Christ and Christ alone. The church is called to be the place where people have an alternative imagination. It is one where like Isaiah 19:24 we read God saying: "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria, the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage." We are called not to believe in an exceptionalism that is based upon our country, but rather on an exceptionalism that is based upon our God who calls out all nations to him. Who, as Paul states, calls them out to live with Christ all the days of their lives.

This is why we ought to be proud to be Christian because Christ has demanded of us a life of grace. In a time where in this community and in this region people see the bombing in Manchester and the first thought that comes to mind is a hatred for Muslims, we are called to love even those who hate us, we are called to a life of pride based upon being a servant to all. Being proud to be a Christian takes an alternative imagination, one that is not reflected around us.

When we are proud to be a Christian it is not because we have vanquished anyone. It is because we have loved everyone. We were watching the news when we heard about the bombing. You realize nothing keeps danger from being danger, especially Jesus. Jesus does not protect us from bombing. Danger is not optional when we live this life, but fear is. If we trust in Jesus and if we are proud to be a Christian then nothing can cause fear in our lives. This is the alternative imagination that we ought to have. It isn't recklessness, but it is risky.

Faith is knowing that you will always have something to stand on or you will be taught how to fly. Brothers and sisters, Paul reminds us that Christ has given us life and that life ought to be one that

we can be proud of because Christ was able to work through us. As American's we can't allow ourselves to have an exceptionalism mentality which makes us great and others weak. Christ, in fact, tells us to do the opposite, that Christ will use our weakness to make us strong. Amen.