

Sermon Text for May 7, 2017

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Exodus 2: 1-10, Romans 5: 12-14

“A Matter of Life and Death”

It has been over a month since we were last in the book of Romans. We had Palm Sunday and then Easter and then Youth Sunday and then last week I was on vacation so Holly preached. I'm guessing you may have forgotten what Romans is all about. We began the series way back in October of 2016 and we said that Romans is a letter of substance which helps us to understand our faith in the most fundamental way possible. Hence the title for the series: Faith for dummies. We need help understanding our faith.

The last time we were in Romans we heard the liberating words: that God proved his love for us, gave us proof of his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. But this week we find out how we can become no longer enemies, no longer strangers with God, how do we become friends of God. We know that God loves us in spite of our sin, we just heard that, but how do we choose to be non-sinners, or as the New Testament question is asked: what must I do to be saved, what must I do to no longer be separated from God, how do I no longer fall short of the glory of God?

Paul uses a comparison of Adam and Christ and basically says, you choose. God has already chosen you even when you hated him, now you choose. It's interesting because we find out who Adam and Jesus are by their choices. One chose obedience, the other disobedience, one chose life the other death. Have you ever thought that our daily choices can lead us in one direction or another?

Let me tell you about a choice that I made with a friend of mine in the congregation right before Good Friday. You know for Good Friday we need that center light which shines on the cross. Well, the light was out so we got a suction tool to replace it, but when the two of us went to replace it we forgot to put the string on the end of it so then we not only had a light that was out but a suction on the light with a pole hanging down from it. So, the only option was getting a ladder which could reach it. We discovered that if you up a table right next to the organ it is the same height so you can put a ladder on top and you are good to go. We did that, I reached the top rung of this

ladder and the back legs kicked out and I held on for dear life and landed right on my back side against the wall. I was more surprised that I didn't die that I looked up at him and said: I'm okay!

Have you ever thought that your choices can lead you to either life or death? Well, they can, and Paul lays it out for us in regards to what that means for our faith in Romans.

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One of Tony Campolo's favorite stories is about God's providence and hand in our lives when we don't even know it. He was invited to speak at a revival and before he was to speak all the pastors gathered around him and prayed for him. They made him get down on his knees and they all laid hands on him. Each pastor had to beat the other in their prayer, after a while his knees were hurting and the hands of the pastors were getting heavier and heavier. A couple of the pastors had fallen asleep and were using his head as a prop to keep them from falling over. One pastor started to pray for every single thing that he could think of. Almost as if he were going down the prayer list of his church. And bless Joe and Susan on their 50 year anniversary. I thought they were supposed to be praying for me.

Then he starts praying for this guy named Charlie Stolfus. Lord, speak to Charlie, you know, Charlie who lives two blocks from here, right there on Elm, in that white mobile home on the corner, as if God needed directions to get to the guy's house in order to answer that prayer. Lord, you need to change Charlie's heart from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh. He is leaving his wife and children, he is a drunk, and he beats them, Lord, speak to Charlie now. Campolo was ready to speak up. But the prayers ended, he led the revival and then he got in his car to drive the hour trip to Philadelphia where he lived.

As he was getting on the freeway his car stalled and he had to roll down the entrance ramp before he could stop and there was a guy hitchhiking right on the ramp. Campolo never picked up hitchhikers but here he felt that God was giving him a sign, especially when the guy hopped in the car and the car started right up. Where are you going? Philly, yeah, me too. My name's Tony, hey, I'm Charlie. Really? I'm Tony Campolo, I'm Charlie Stolfus. Campolo almost hit the brakes. At the next exit he got

off and turned around and started heading right back from where he came. Where are you going? Said Charlie? I'm taking you home! How do you know where I live? God told me! And he drove those two block to elm street to the white mobile home on the corner took Charlie in and spent the rest of the night with the couple and reconciliation was found.

All of our lives God gives us opportunities to choose between life and death. If we look for those opportunities to pursue life, God will continue to give us opportunities to work for him and to see God's blessings and power. Today Paul talks about two people who both began with a choice after God had placed them on this earth. Adam began his life with a choice to succumb to temptation or to pursue God's desire. He chose to turn his back on God and as Paul states sin came into the world through this one man. And death was a result of sin, but lest we blame Adam for everything, Paul states so death has spread to all for all have sinned.

Likewise Jesus began his life, remember right after he was baptized before he began his ministry he was led to the wilderness to be tempted and instead he said thou should not tempt the Lord your God. Two people who through their choices, had a tremendous impact upon humanity. Both had a choice between life and death. Christ was able to get us out of the mess that Adam first got us into.

It is very clear to Paul that death is present in this world because of sin. That is what he is saying here. The choice between life and death is a choice between Christ and Adam, obedience and disobedience, life and bondage. But if you look at the world around you, you will see that Jews, Christians, Muslims, good Christians and bad Christians, believers and non-believers, all have the same mortality rate, 100%. Woody Allen said about death, I'm not really afraid of dying, I just don't want to be there when it happens.

We aren't comfortable saying that sin leads to death. What kind of sin did the 5 year old girl commit to cause her to die of Leukemia? We have a hard time accepting and believing that sin has the capability of altering reality. We live in a time when we think sin has no real tangible effect upon us. But this is what Paul states that just as death is universal so sin is universal. But death is not the result of specific and individual sin,

but rather the universal sin that has been around since Adam, through the first basket case of Moses, all the way to us today.

This is why Jesus died for us. Not because of our moral mistakes and so that we could be better people, no. Not because we make bad choices that sometimes hurt those around us. Jesus died for us so that as Paul states here in Romans, so that this cycle of death could be reversed, and it was reversed in Christ. You know, when we are born everyone is laughing and we are the only ones crying. When we die all will be crying but it should be our day to shine. We should be laughing and rejoicing like we have never danced before. Because we know that sin has not won, because Christ chose us to inherit eternal life. Through our lives we need to choose Christ over sin, over death, and at the end of our lives we will have something to prove for it.

Some of us think that we are immune to the effect of sin in our lives. I used to think that. I was baptized, raised in the church, but for me it was just a part of the societal norms and it was what I was supposed to do. As I got older I saw church as a prison where very specific rules had to be kept. You had to be quiet, stand up and sit down at certain times, sing songs that only those 4 generations before me knew, wear certain clothes that nobody was comfortable in. For me being a Christian was worse than being dead, who would want to follow all those rules and live a certain way just because a guy in a black robe said you were supposed to.

But when I heard that in my baptism God chose me before I could choose him, that God loved me even if I didn't choose him, then it opened the doors for me to understand that all that we do today is a response of our belief. Being a Christian does not mean following certain Presbyterian rules, or certain rules that someone in my position may make. Being a Christian means recognizing that you are free to choose life because life already chose us. It freed me to hear the words of Christ who said you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free, when all along I thought that following Christ was following certain archaic, dead rules. I realized that I didn't have to follow the status quo in order to be a Christian.

I was at McDonalds the other day and right next to me this young couple walked in. He had an ear ring that looked like a dog bone, a lip ring and a nose ring. She had a belly button ring and who knows what else. And right away I could feel myself almost

discounting them and a voice saying, they're lost. I thought I knew what choices they had made in life. Their food came and they reached across the table, held hands, and prayed.

Brothers and sisters hear and believe the good news, freeing word of the Gospel, today we have a choice between life and death. That choice is between our old way of life and a life in Christ which leads to eternal life. Don't be deceived, our decision has a tremendous impact upon us as individuals and upon all of those around us. Allow your life to be shaped by your decision that has as its source Jesus Christ. Amen.