

# Sermon Text For July 9, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Proverbs 3:5-8, Romans 7:14-25

*“Lord, help me”*

We had a wonderful time in Maine in the week that we were gone. We got to see all of our girls together probably for the last time this summer until the end of August. We hiked all over Acadia, and one day we even got a bit lost. But fortunately for us the paths are marked. Let me show you how they are marked. These are cairns, I'm sure you probably know that, but as you read the sign that you put in front of a cairn here and there it is a reminder. If you tamper with the cairn it can, see the first one, it can mislead hikers. Here we are a family of believers and every Sunday we gather together on a hike. Every Sunday we don't know the path that we are going to take, but we have cairn, a guide, a lead that allows us to understand the paths that we take, even if we don't know how difficult or easy it may be. That cairn is our Scripture, it is the Holy Bible.

I thought a lot about the nature of our ministry here together and realized that we aren't making this up as we go. We aren't adding or subtracting from Scripture, but rather it is Scripture that guides and leads us, which is why we do the 90 Day and 150 Day Challenges so that we can be more in touch with what the Bible says.

I can't help but look at how hard we scurry around in our world with the best, most up to date technology, the latest devices, the most progressive and at times regressive political thinking and be reminded of how hard people work for a certain goal never once stopping to wonder, is this where God want me to go, is this what I am supposed to be doing.

We rely so much upon our own understanding and ability, without cairns to guide us. Or we find a guide, maybe even Scripture at times, and we just change one or two things because it doesn't sit well with us, and it ends up misleading us and taking us to a place where the Lord doesn't want us to go. We have become so good, so advanced, so quick that when something happens, we don't know what to do. Our first Scripture in Proverbs, don't you love it. It is absolutely a memory Scripture, it tells us very clearly not to rely on our own insight, do not be wise in your own eyes and we will be rewarded. Paul tells us in Romans today the more we rely upon ourselves, the more we try to do the right thing by ourselves, the further we get from God.

It just doesn't make sense because we try to do the right thing but we get further away from where we ought to be and what we ought to be doing. Finally we get to the point where we can't help but say, Lord, help me, when we realize that we cannot help ourselves but that something bigger, more powerful has to take over. Let's learn how to lean upon God's understanding and not ours.

### **READ SCRIPTURE**

Some of the most confusing and yet at the same time most entertaining Scriptures are the verses 19-20 of Romans 7. Listen to them again. Doesn't it sound a bit like Frank Sinatra. But Paul is repeating a very real and frustrating truth that as Christians we all seem to struggle with. We know what we are supposed to do, our mind and our heart tells us what we are supposed to do, but as we hear the mind is willing but the body is weak. We just don't do it.

Do I need to give examples? You know them, from the innocuous and the mundane with eating, or drinking, work we should get done, to money we shouldn't spend that, to words that we use, and the list goes on and on. We know right away as soon as we do something that it is not the good that we want, but the evil that we do not want, that is what we do. So verse 20 tells us that every single time that we want to do the right thing, evil is at hand to persuade you to do wrong.

C.S. Lewis in his book the Screwtape letters sets up a dialogue between a superior demon and a worker demon. The goal is to get the worker demon to sway his subject, an unknowing human to sin and ultimately to turn away from God and to Satan. Over and over you hear the superior say to the worker, just make him think that he can do anything by himself, in fact make some things easy for him to do so that he no longer feels that he needs God's help for anything. That is what we have become, things have become so easy for us, we have a solution for everything, from our kids to our finances and even to our relationship with God.

The author of Proverbs says that at the root of this maddening struggle is our attempt to think and act upon the premise that we are in control. The problem is that we trust in ourselves with all of our heart and do not rely upon God's insight. The problem is that we think we are wise enough to make ourselves leaders of a state, to dictate who is in and out of favor in the world. Then along comes a North Korea who doesn't follow any rules and we suddenly recognize that it really isn't up to us, is it?

As a result we do not fear the Lord, and we embrace evil. Whatever we want we make goals to get, we try as hard as we can, we strive to the point of exhaustion, and we come up short. Why? Because we have never gotten to the point where we have stopped and said, Lord, help me. Almighty God, I am going to work just as hard for your goals as I am for my own goals. How do we know if what we are pursuing is a mere chasing after the wind and after 20 years of toil you feel empty, depleted, as if you've just wasted the best years of your life chasing after spurious things.

Jesus says in Matthew 11, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. So often we are too proud to say Lord, help me, and we insist on trying to carry the burden, do it all by ourselves when Christ has promised that he has shoulders big enough for all of our burdens.

As we work through this chapter in Romans we see how Paul finally gets to the breaking point. First of all, isn't it nice to know that Paul himself, he's telling his personal story here, but isn't it nice that Paul has the same problems we have? Luther once stated about these verses in his Romans commentary: "It is a great consolation to us to learn that such a great apostle was involved in the same grievings and afflictions in which we find ourselves when we wish to be obedient to God." Paul finally says in verse 24: Wretched man that I am. It is at this point that Paul realizes that he has tried over and over and over again to fix things by himself and he just can't, it hasn't worked.

When we get to that point we would probably be in a bigger mess than when we first started trying to get ourselves out of the situation. We are faced today in Pennsylvania and in this area of the world with an opioid crisis that is far worse than I would guess most of you realize. It is a crisis because when you are hooked on opioids you simply cannot say to yourself: I am going to stop. I have seen people lose hundreds of pounds simply by saying I'm going to do it. I've seen alcoholics say enough is enough and just stop cold turkey. I've seen the same with smokers. But in my 24 years of experience with people who have ruined their lives and their families the only way that they can get better is if they go away and realize they can't do it on their own. They are not able to get better by just sheer determinism and will power. It doesn't work.

We find ourselves at a certain point like Paul Robeson saying: "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen". Sometimes it takes that finality, that desperateness in order for us

to come before God and say, you want this load? You take it, tell me what to do, I don't want to run around doing everything wrong, guide me and use me. Lord, help me. And it is important for all of us to get there, to realize that we are wretched, but not stay there too long. You see Christians are not whiners, Christians are not complainers. Christians are not pessimists but optimists, Christians are not fatalists but rather celebrationists because we know that with God's help we can do all things.

So Paul explodes and says right after that Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. There is a place for the blues but only to help us realize that by ourselves we can do nothing, with God, we can do all things. How does that song go anyway? Nobody know the trouble I've seen,...glory hallelu.

Brothers and sisters our striving by ourselves is doomed for failure until we get to the point that we recognize our need for God. At that point we hear psalm 121 I lift up my eyes unto the hills, from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. We try so hard to do the right thing, but we are never able to unless we turn that decision, that circumstance, our very lives over to God then will we be able to say thanks be to God through Jesus Christ. Amen.