

Sermon Text for August 20, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 139:1-6, Romans 8:26-27

“Can I get a witness?”

Here we find ourselves ready to launch as school starts next week and soon we will find ourselves knee deep with children in our preschool, Clubhouse, parent’s day out and toddler gym. We are starting up new Sunday School classes and the women’s study will be gearing up soon as well. We have a plan for our children, a plan for our youth with Dan Smith coming on board, I’m really excited, and the church really seems to be in a position of strength. Oh, we have a plan for you too as we launch today our 90 Day Challenge part III, to get this congregation into the Word of God so that we don’t just make up what we believe as we go along, but actually use Scripture as the foundation of our beliefs.

But be careful, the Scripture is full of examples where God uses what we think is strong to confound and what we consider to be weak to be the strength of God. What example we have with the baptism of Lyla, the weakness of a baby has the power to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In her weakness we find the strength of the truth that God has called us, God has claimed us, God has said I love you and you are mine, before we could even speak. What a witness to God’s love and continual presence.

Last week we saw suffering. In these verses Paul gives us three promises that deal with suffering. A couple of weeks ago we saw that we can face suffering as people who know the Lord differently from those who don’t because first of all it is no big deal. Remember, compared to the glory of what we are going to one day experience, there is nothing that we can go through in this world that can even compare, that is even close to what we go through here and now.

You have to set it in perspective, the bleakest, darkest, hardest moments in our life compared to the glory that is to come through Jesus Christ in the day of reconciliation, it is no big deal. Today we receive a second promise, a second reassurance that we need to hear in the midst of suffering from verses 26-27 in Romans. This promise is that we have a witness, we have someone who intercedes on our behalf for our sake and for God’s sake. When we can’t or don’t know how to pray, how to speak or what to do it says we have a witness, someone who testifies on our behalf. We

have someone who, in our weakness, takes our place and gives us all that we need in order to move forward in our lives. Let's take comfort together in this reassurance today.

READ SCRIPTURE

I absolutely love psalm 139, I use it consistently when I go to the hospital, except for the last 6 verses. Oh I knew you would just check the Bible to find those verses that I didn't like. Psalm 139 should be the most comforting psalm in all of Scripture, even more than psalm 23. Read it again. God knows everything about us. Every single thing. God knows what we are going to say before we say, God knows what we are going to wear even before we put it on and take it off a dozen times before we decide. God knows how we were formed in our mother's womb, God knows how many more days of life we have to live, is there anyone who knows you as well as God knows you? No, in fact God knows us so well that it is an absolute mystery, completely out of our grasp to understand why God not only loves us, but still actually likes us.

What this psalm and eventually what we are going to see Paul tell us is very simply Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so, little ones to him belong, they are weak, but he is strong. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. What we hear is that we are weak, if God took God's breath away from us, God's spirit away from us we would die.

How are we weak? Look at I Corinthians 2:1-5 and Paul tells us, then again in I Corinthians 1:26-29. Jesus focuses on the foolish in order to teach us how to live. He is our witness. It is foolish to give your life for your neighbor, but Jesus tells us that there is no greater love demonstrated than in doing exactly that. But what does the world tell us? Don't be foolish, be prudent, don't be weak, be strong, don't be poor because nice guys finish last. So prudence is called wisdom, privilege is called power and passion is defined as pretending that we are generous. Paul tells us today that it is okay to rely upon the Lord and to lean on his understanding, because it is all that we have. It is because of the witness of the foolishness of the cross which overcomes all of our supposed mastery.

Twice in these verses Paul tells us that the Spirit will intercede for us. When we rely upon our own strength we believe that it is the only way to get things done. There is no way that certain things can happen in our own world view. Our vulnerability and our inabilities we see as barriers to bringing about God's kingdom. Our vulnerability is a scandal to the church, it then becomes an impossibility. It is there where we find God's sweetspot. When things seem impossible, God is able to work better than ever.

I went to visit a woman once who had been in a vegetative state for a long, long time, she was completely unresponsive. I held her hand and prayed for her and she squeezed my hand during that prayer. She knew she couldn't pray, she knew she wasn't able to, but she also knew that she had a witness, she had somebody to pray for her, on her behalf. This is what Paul states. When we do not know how to pray, when we are caught up in the world and its message of acting only when it is possible, then we confound the impossible with not being the will of God. Instead, God works in that which we see as myth, which we see as out of the realm of possibility.

There are times when the contractions of life are coming so fast and furious, one after another, that we are too weak, and tired, too mad and sad to even be able to lift up our voice to God. God has to intervene and send a witness on our behalf because we just can't do it on our own. Paul tells us, reassures us today that in the midst of our suffering we have a witness who intercedes for us. The Holy Spirit is the one who surprises us, the Holy Spirit is the one who takes our weakness, our suffering, our sacrifice, our Heather Heyers and turned them into a fulcrum, a pressure point where God is able to bring about transformation.

Paul's main point in showing us that we have a witness is to remind us that God is in the business of interceding for us. Paul references prayer here, when we just don't know how to pray. How should we pray for our country today? How do we pray for this congregation which may not be united politically but is unified in their love for Jesus? How do we pray for us as individuals as we try to figure out what our responsibility is for our neighbor? How do we pray as the year begins and we don't just focus on children and youth but also focus on all of us as we look to bring about God's kingdom? We don't know, we really don't know how to pray. But it is okay, we have a witness, can I get a witness? It is the Holy Spirit, and with the Holy Spirit on our side who can be against us? Amen.