

Sermon Text for October 29, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Deuteronomy 30:11-14, Romans 10:1-13

“Don’t even ask”

I mentioned this past week in my enews that today marks the anniversary of one of the most important events in all of history. If you do not come from a mainline church then you this last Sunday of October may not have much meaning to you. If you come from a church that just focuses on how to grow and growth is the ultimate and only goal, then you may not know the impact that this event which took place 500 years ago. But if you come from a church that has tradition, has roots, has been in this community for 185 years, then days like today, are well, important. Today is the anniversary of the Reformation.

The Reformation was a time in history when a single individual was able to identify hypocrisies and terrible practices that were taking place in the church and place a finger on them in such a way that the church actually changed. Martin Luther is someone whom I admire not only because he was able to start a movement, but primarily because of the way that he did it. I have been told by many of my pastor friends that I should leave this denomination because it doesn’t reflect a certain culture with which they can’t identify. But then I look at Martin Luther. He never left the church which he was trying to reform. He forced them to kick him out. I’m impressed by that, I’m impressed by people who stand up for what they believe and don’t buckle under pressure to do what others want them to do.

My dad was asked to leave a church after he marched on Selma with MLK when the session didn’t give him permission to do it. My brother was kicked out of Honduras in the late 80’s as he was working there trying to help the plight of the poor. It runs in my blood, which might be why I admire Martin Luther so much and see today as more historically significant than any other event besides the events matched up with my Savior. I don’t want you to leave today unaware of the importance of this day.

Romans was one Luther’s favorite books of the Bible because of the repeated confirmations that we are saved by grace through faith and not by the works of our hands, or our minds, or our lips. It isn’t what we do that saves us, it isn’t what we think that saves us, it isn’t what we say that saves us. It is the act of Jesus on the cross which saves us. This is a very reformed way of thinking, it is very Calvinistic, as opposed to

Anabaptist or Wesleyan. We cannot contribute to our salvation in any way, shape or form, only God is in charge of that arena.

A few weeks ago we spoke about how we cannot strive for righteousness because it is unattainable, but rather we are called to stumble into Christ. The whole concept that we do not have to strive to be made righteous before God because we can never attain righteousness by ourselves is so easily forgotten when we live in a culture of rules that supposedly tell us of our worthiness before God. Even without trying we have been made righteous by Jesus Christ. There is no list of rules that we have to follow but rather the presence of Christ upon this earth as Savior has established a trust and a closeness to God that no laws could ever provide or could ever substitute.

Today we take the next step after that sermon since we had stewardship in there. We see that this accessibility to God that we all have should never create a sense in us of well, I know that I am saved, but what about those others? I know that I love Christ, I am counted in that number, but what about the rest. The answer that Paul gives us is: Don't even ask. If you want to know who is condemned then you want to know too much, be secure and satisfied that God is not removed from you, but rather God is in your heart and on your lips this morning.

AMEN

This whole week I have been talking with many of you about how it is human nature for us to automatically take sides for or against something. If someone says that they are in favor of one issue then someone assumes that you are against another. If someone is a Nittany Lion then you assume that they dislike the Buckeyes. Here if we say that those who believe in Christ are going to heaven the most logical, human assumption is: well then the others must be going to hell, what other choice is there? You find as you go through life that if someone is in favor of something, it doesn't automatically mean that they are opposed to its counterpart.

The same is true in regards to salvation. If we say that God so loved the world we mean it. When we say that all those who call on Jesus' name shall be saved we mean it. But it does not cancel out the fact that God loves the world and it doesn't create ipso facto that God will condemn those who didn't call on Jesus name.

Paul begins Romans 10, this is the part we didn't read, take your time and look through it. He is talking about the zeal, the passion, the same word that Jesus uses when he drives the money changers out of the temple and it is said of him that the zeal of the

house consumes him. Paul talks about the zeal that the Israelites had for goodness, for the law, for doing the right things. He calls that idolatry. Now what does that mean? How can doing the right thing be idolatry? How can you try too hard to be good? Because this passion for righteousness for being good, was not enlightened. They were doing it for the wrong reasons.

The tragedy is that when we strive solely for what we consider to be the law of God, to follow the rules and nothing else matters, then only the rules become important, and we begin to wonder if God can maintain our relationship even if we don't keep the rules. If I stopped working so hard to keep these rules then my relationship with God would crumble. God doesn't need our help to save us. God doesn't need our help to be in relationship with us. God loves us and wants to be in relationship with us and we should want to be in relationship with God not because the Bible tells us so, but because we love God.

We want some of our virtue to fall back on, not much, but just enough to say that we contributed for the cause. We want a small part of our relationship to be credited to our worth in God's eyes. In that moment God has been rejected as God by us. I am sure you have seen it and have probably been a victim to it. How often do you feel like a failure because you have been trying so hard to do what is right. You try to quit smoking and you can't, you try to cut back on your drinking and it works for a while, but then you go back stronger than ever, you try to keep a quiet time consistently, only to fail. This is our doing, our striving to be righteous. These are good things but when our relationship with God is defined by how much we smoke, drink, read the Bible, or watch TV, then we forget that it is God who defines our relationship with him and not vice-versa.

Look at verses 6 and 7, here Paul states that when we try to live our lives according to the righteousness that we have set out before us, we are denying the closeness of Christ to us. When we strive for righteousness we assume that Christ is out of reach, as far as the heavens or as low as the depths of the earth. We deny that the Word is near you, on your lips and in your heart. Who is the Word? Who is the logos? John 1 states that in the beginning was the word, the word was with God and the word was God, nothing that was created was created without the word, and the word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus Christ is the word and God came near, came to us, we did not reach out, but God came in.

Have you seen the people on the corner just before you get to sugar on top. If you stopped by they would probably ask the question: where will you be if you died today. I'm sure they are nice people but I couldn't help to think of how hard they are striving to make us reach God, when all along it is God who reaches out to us. I wanted to say what Yogi Berra said as he was in the dugout and they were showing all the Yankees who had died in the last year and he looked over to one of his players and said: boy I hope I never see my name on that list.

Don't even ask. Paul tells us in these verses that Christ is so close to us that we don't even have to strive for him. He is on our lips and on our heart. This is a direct quote from Deuteronomy where Moses is talking to the people about the law. He was telling them that the law is something that you can rely on because it is there to build your trust in God. It is not far away, you can trust in it. The law was given not so you could rely upon your own trust, but in God's. Verse 9 Paul tells us that the law which produces in us an inevitable decline to idolatry was replaced by Jesus Christ upon which we can rely on more than anything else.

The proof that we have in Christ is seen in the resurrection which causes us to trust in our salvation. Don't even ask if you are saved or not. This was Luther's driving point, we are saved by grace. No questions asked. Do you believe in Jesus Christ, have you confessed his saving power, then rest assured and get on with your life, don't even ask. NO one who believes will ever be put to shame. No one. If you do not believe, this Scripture is sure, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

No matter what background you come from, no matter whether you are Greek or Jew, black or white, rich or poor, pretty or ugly, drive a Rolls or a Rabbit, if you golf or fish, if you call upon the name of Jesus Christ, you will be saved. Period. Don't even ask what if you don't, just do it.

Amen.