

Sermon Text for October 8, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Hosea 2:21-23, Romans 9:19-29

“The people of God”

Do you remember what the key word from last week was? Mercy, we were reminded that God is a God of mercy first and foremost. We do not serve an angry God, but a loving God. But as Christians who consider ourselves the beloved ones, how do we come to terms with others who feel that they also serve a God of mercy and love and God has chosen them to be the beloved children of God. One way to deal with this issue that you will probably hear more often than not is that you’re wrong, I’m right, I’m going to heaven, and you’re not.

We like to take a different perspective and Paul begins by saying this God of mercy that we have heard so much about, is not one that any one group can choose and claim as his own. It is God who does the choosing. Have you heard the term chosen people? Are these people chosen because they chose themselves? No, it is God who chooses and so it is God, and only God, who calls those whom he loves, beloved.

Paul teaches us today what it means to be a child of God, and that not one of us, especially we as Christians who live here in Strasburg, ought to take for granted that we are rightful heirs to God’s throne, as if we can inherit that position through birth, but rather as obedient children we ought to see ourselves in a much larger family than we ever expected. We are, absolutely the children of God, but that does not mean that we get to choose who is a member of our family.

READ SCRIPTURE

When I was about 8 years old we moved to the United States from Italy. My parents were American missionaries, and I really did not want to come to this country. I was a bit unhappy the first few, let’s say, the first few months that I was here in the United States. So, one day I made up my mind to run away from home. The thing about running away from home for me at that age was that I didn’t realize that you weren’t supposed to tell anyone. So I wrote out this note to my mom that I was going to leave her before I ran away and that evening that I was going to run away as she tucked me into bed I read it to her: Dear mom, I am running away because Timmy is mean to me, John is mean to me, Daddy is mean to me, and David is just a little mean to me. You are the

only one that is nice. I had a late night dinner packed and everything. My mom didn't have to talk me out of it, I never woke up to run away.

There might be times in our lives that we just don't want to be a part of the family in which we find ourselves. As a kid it can come down to a time when you will ask a question and the only answer to the question essentially boils down to: because I'm the dad. For example when we have ice cream after dinner and the kids get the small bowls and I get a heaping bowl full and they say why, I can say because I'm the dad. Now for the parent that works, but for the child the question has still not been answered and a lingering question still remains.

Paul begins these verses in Romans basically with that type of response from God. The question that is asked is, if God is ultimately to the core a God of mercy and it is completely up to God who will receive mercy, then how in the end can God say that someone is at fault when everyone is at fault. It is not fair for God to do that when it is not up to us. Do you see that in verse 19?

Paul's response is, it is fair, you will not understand it now, but it is because God is the father, and you're not. Who are you to argue with God? And he uses the example from Genesis and from Isaiah 29:16, to put us back in our place. We cannot call God to account for God's actions. As much as we would like to, we cannot demand from God an explanation of God's actions. The clay is to be shaped, molded, used as a vessel so that God's mercy can pour out into that vessel and out into the world.

We find ourselves in a time when the mercies of God seem to be losing to the will of humanity. 58 killed and nearly 500 wounded by a single man. We are living in an era where a single person is able to inflict so much harm on a general population than we have ever seen before in history. In the past a single individual could hurt a few people before he was taken down. Today, with airplanes flying into buildings which not only took the lives of thousands but changed an entire psyche of a nation, we have to recognize that what we believe about the mercies of God.

In the past random acts of nature could be lifted up as we are just the clay and He is the potter so who are we to question? But when random acts of nature in our country continue to hit areas that are more poor and have a vastly exaggerated affect on them compared to other areas, or when a single individual is able to inflict so much carnage we have to wonder, where is the will of God in all of this?

These verses are a strong dose of reality to those of us who are used to getting explanations and answers from people when things happen. Paul goes on to say how God plans on showing his mercy to those around him is not up to us, as much as we would like to think it is. Remember, God's glory will be shown, even if we are not a part or an active participant in the facilitation of that glory.

There is no greater example in Scripture of this concept of God showing God's mercy upon whomever God will show God's mercy than seen in Matthew 15:21-28. This woman who as a Samaritan was well outside of the parameters that were set up to be considered a child of God here is received and accepted as a child of God by Jesus himself. Again we have set up in our minds who are not children of God. I thank God that God's mercy extends far beyond our mercy.

Verse 24 can be seen as the key verse in these Scriptures. Paul establishes the fact that God's mercies have been shown through not only the traditional "people" of God or those chosen, but also through the gentiles, those traditionally understood as not chosen by God.

He refers to the Hosea verse that states those who at one time we considered not my people, lo-ammi, they are now my people. Those who were considered outside of God's grace and power, they are now part of my family. Who do we consider today outside of God's family? Who today is called not my people, who is considered unloved? God tells us to be careful of who you call not my people.

In fact, Paul continues, look at Isaiah, only a remnant, but a few of those who now consider themselves to be my people will indeed be my people. It is God who chooses God's people. But in these last verses it is very clear that Paul is speaking about those gentiles who have accepted Christ and so at one time may not have been considered my people but now through Christ are his people and those Jews, the vast majority of who did not accept Christ and only a handful, a remnant, accepted Christ.

There can be no doubt that there is a warning here for all people, that if we refuse Christ as Savior, God just may honor our refusal. This morning is just as strong as the warning to those who might assume that they are children of God because they grew up in the church, they were born in a Christian family, they attend an established church, a child of God is one who has received Christ as Savior, but who even against his own will has already been received and chosen by God.