

# Sermon Text for January 28, 2018

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

I Kings 7:13-14, Romans 12:3-8

## ***“Know your role”***

Well, I guess it was a good thing that I spoke on Christian ethics last week and gave a game plan on how we are to live our lives as Christians especially when unexpected events take place, like the Eagles making it to the Super Bowl. As I said, I will root for the Eagles, but that does not make me a fan. Last week we saw Christian ethics and what it means to live as a Christian and have our bodies reflect and our actions reflect the will of God. Today we figure out what role are we to play as we live out our Christian ethics.

As I listened to the analysis over the week one recurring theme kept coming up. It seems like those teams that are able to maintain a specific mantra over and over again would be successful. That mantra was: do your job. If you are a lineman and you have a responsibility, make sure you carry that responsibility. You don't have to do your neighbor's job, just do your job. The same is true for the defensive backs, for the tight ends, every single play every single person has a job that they are to do. Those teams whose players do their jobs and aren't concerned about their neighbor's job tend to have the most success. When everyone does their job, there is unity, the team wins, or is at least in the best position to win.

That is Paul's message today in relationship to the church. Know your role and be happy in that role and live it out joyfully and the church will be contributing to the kingdom of God as a result of you knowing and living in your role. Our Old Testament passage today is pretty obscure, but it speaks about someone who did just that. They were assigned a task, and they did it. That's all we hear about him. In the New Testament the Apostle Paul encourages us and lays out some of the roles in which we may find ourselves. Let's read and try to understand our role and how we can stick to our role.

### **READ SCRIPTURE**

We started our sermon series in Romans in October of 2016. We have been through a lot since we first began looking at Paul and his words to this beloved community in Rome. Think of what your life was like a year and a half ago? Think of what we have been through as individuals and as a congregation, and as a nation, over this past year and a half. Today, on this Sunday when we baptize, receive into membership, when we look at the life of the church during our congregational meeting and as we look at the yearly report, as we get ourselves ready for a big week and when we just know that this entire region's productivity is going to drop to record

low levels, we find ourselves asking what is my role in all of this? What is my role in my family? What is my role in my community, what is my role in my job? What is my role in this church, with this body of people. We gather today and ask that question because the Scripture demands that we ask it.

I wonder if that Old Testament bronze worker asked that question while he was working on the temple: what am I doing here? What is my purpose in life? I'm pretty sure he didn't. I'm pretty sure he knew what he was doing and what his role was. Why am I sure, turn to that Scripture and we see that we know something about him. We know that his father is no longer around, but that his father was a very, very well known bronze worker. His mother is a widow and so maybe, just maybe, he is trying to make a name for himself, get out from under the shadow of his father. We don't know if he had a family or not, but what we do know about him we find in vs. 14 where we read that he was full of skill, intelligence, and knowledge in working with bronze. So he got to work, if you read the remainder of this chapter you will see the magnificent work that he does to build the house of God. God used this unknown man to help build the most important religious structure of his day, and really almost in all of history when you think about the temple and the meaning it carries even to this day.

We don't read that when he started his work he looked over at the stone workers and thought, boy, everyone sees their work from the outside, I wish I could be a stone worker. Or he looked over at the woodworkers and fantasized what it would be like to work with wood and make all the furniture and all the items that the priests would use. He was satisfied with his skills, his gift, his role and he stuck to it. What he did was important work, and the king asked him to do it, so he was going to do it as best as he knew how.

The king, the king of kings calls us to a task, to a role, to responsibilities. When we pick up in Paul we read his encouragement to know our role and to be satisfied with it. We are going to basically be going through verse by verse in this Scripture so you might as well open your Bible or look at it up on the screen. He begins in vs.3 by saying: in order to know your role, you have to realize that you are not as indispensable as you think you are. Did you catch that? Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought, he says. Yes, you are absolutely precious, you are so valuable in the eyes of the Father, but be sober in how you consider yourself. I know you are the NFC champs, but, wait, wrong example. Paul goes on and says he has assigned us all with grace and with faith, each one of us. So your neighbor has that same grace and faith as you do. As you consider your role, consider that God has given you one, but that you are a part of a team. Do your job, don't try to do everyone else's job.

He shifts a bit then from vs.3 and reminding us that we all have grace and faith from God to equip us to carry out our role to speaking about what happens when we recognize our role and live it out, it creates unity. The church is a body and what makes us tick is that not all of us have the same function. So in verses 4 and 5 he speaks about the roles that we have are for the purpose of bringing unity to the body so that the body can carry out God's purposes, not our individual desires.

So as we look around here at this church, we are one body in Christ. It is Jesus, our loving Savior who unites us here. We are bringing in a new family from another member of the body, not a different body, but the same body because of the unity that we find in the Trinitarian God. So what is my role in this body, where do I find myself now? Now, as individuals, we have a responsibility to each other. This is key. It is one thing to say that we are the world and we are family, it is another to say: I have a responsibility for you. You know, baptism does that, it makes that promise. The parents promise to raise the child in the church, the church promises to provide a safe environment for this child, to teach her well, to support the family, to hold them accountable. We each have our role in baptism. No one in this church gets out of here today without an added responsibility, without an added joy, no one.

Paul says it this way in vs.5, we are members of one another. What God does to this body is give us various gifts that differ, but each one useful and important. We find it reflected in baptism. We also find it represented in our yearly report. When you read through it you will see people represented who know their roles and make this church run. But you are and have to be a part of that narrative as well. Today we are reminded of our roles in so many different ways.

Once Paul puts into context our roles for the purpose of bringing unity to the body, he begins to lay out some of these roles. Now, what we have in front of us is not an exhaustive list. Even if you add it to I Corinthians 12 which also gives a whole list of spiritual gifts but even between them it is not exhaustive. Just use it as an opportunity to see where and with what role do you most closely identify. Let's look at these roles that Paul addresses, starting at vs.6. Again, not exhaustive and certainly not in order of importance, but the first he speaks about is the role of prophesying. It is not what you think. There are some people who just know what is happening in the life of the church. They have been praying for a new youth pastor ever since we made the announcement that we are looking for one. They have been praying for Melanie and her family as they begin to look to transition out of the program and they have been praying already for the family that might be coming in next. This person knows that God is already

preparing that family and this person knows that Melanie and the girls need our prayers. This person has been praying for our adult mission trip to Houston and the work that we are going to do and the families that we are going to touch.

The prophet in this church is simply someone who knows the life of the church and bathes the life of this church in prayer, and God speaks to them in that prayer time so when someone asks them: what do we did with the neighborhood kids who come by Saturday evening and ride their bikes in our parking lot and take advantage of our free water and food, this person, she has an answer that is prophet and without agenda because she has been praying for them. She doesn't speak out of a protectionist stance, she doesn't speak out of an approach of fear. She prays for them, so she feels like she knows them, even though she has never met them. She prays for them so she can prophecy in proportion to the amount of time she has spent in faith praying for them. So when she speaks about issues of the church, we would be wise to listen. That's the prophet in our midst.

Paul speaks about ministry, take the person who serves others through our food bank. You will serve them one way if you pray over them. You will put yourself in their position. You will become their servant and they will become your teacher. The clients of our food bank have value for us because they have something to teach us. So often ministry is seen as us helping others because we have the resources, we have what other people want and need. But Jesus, who had all things under his hand, put a towel around his waist and washed his disciples feet and told them to do the same. Be servants to each other. That is your role.

If you are a teacher, if you bather your children in prayer every single day, if you pray for your adults that you teach, or your young couples, then every interaction that you will have with them, and every happening will be a holy spirit led experience because you expect it to be.

The key to knowing your role, and maybe I didn't mention your role yet, he keeps going in vs.8, but the key to knowing your role and playing out your role is that it is highlighted by faith marked by prayer. God has assigned us faith to carry out our roles and we fulfill our duties by approaching our roles in faith marked by prayer.

If you preach, then you study the Word and pray over the people as you prepare. For some your prayer may linger a little longer than others, because some people just need more prayer than others. He speaks about the leader, the officers of the church, the elder and deacon and trustee of the church, the Presbyterian Women officers, the list goes on, your role is diligence. You don't allow the small things to fall through the cracks. You care more for the church and its work than most people. When you are diligent you are a hard worker. That is the

sign of a leader, a hard worker. You go the extra mile without being asked or without being told. That's just your role.

Paul saves the last one for the compassionate and he speaks specifically about cheerfulness. This is especially true for those in the ministry of compassion. We don't want grumpy deacons. But it is a work for all of us, all Christians. As we carry out all of our roles we ought to do it with cheerfulness. We don't want any grumpy Presbyterians around here. I know we all have bad days, we all have bad weeks, we all have those years or two or more when things just don't go our way. But that is not what defines us and that is not who God has created us to be. He has called us to live life with compassion and cheerfulness.

Paul tells us that we ought to know our role and like Hiram, we have been called by the king to live out our role so that the kingdom would be stronger. So, playing out your role, doing your job, has everything to do with conforming your life to the person of Christ and nothing to do with succumbing to the pressures of this world. When we do our job, live into our roles, then this church will display a unity which can only be equated to the unity found in the human body. Each organ, each member does their part and it allows the beauty of the body to function for God's purposes.

Amen.