

Sermon Text for September 23, 2018

Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Numbers 12:10-16, Acts 5:1-11

“This is serious business”

I'll never forget when I was in Florida and a friend of mine who is a police officer said they were going out in force to try to crack down on the drug dealers and then he said jokingly: would you like to come. And I said, sure. So, for 4 hours I rode around in a police car looking for drug deals going down.

We stopped one car for playing his music too loud and he was so upset. He said, this is the second time in two days that I've been stopped for this. Why aren't you out looking for murderers? This isn't that serious enough. Poor guy got his second ticket in less than 24 hours. The person I was with took his job seriously and did not wink at indiscretions.

Today we are going to read two passages where we see that God does not wink at indiscretions, what we call sin. The Scripture in Acts is quite shocking. What we have seen so far is a Pollyana type community where everything has been going great. We have been lifting this community up as something after which we ought to strive. People are coming to the church, others are healed, everyone has everything in common. It almost makes you think living as a Christian in community is a piece of cake.

Today, well we get a dose of reality. We see how serious it is when we say that we are Christians and that when we say that, something more than just saying it is required of us. Last week we had what I would call a consequential Sunday School class. We asked the question: what in our lives has been adjusted as a result of our relationship with Jesus Christ? If loving God is serious business then we know that God requires and wants us to adjust something in our life because otherwise we aren't taking it seriously. What have you adjusted in our life, ever, as a result of your relationship with God? Let's hear what happens.

READ SCRIPTURE

I know that our increased giving committee is over the moon about the fact that we are covering this Scripture this Sunday. They have been tossing around stewardship themes for November when we will have an entire month devoted to stewardship. There was a frontrunner and I think after today it is going to be solidified: our stewardship theme as a result of this Scripture is give or die. People really will be dying to get in.

This Scripture should keep you awake. This is a shocking Scripture. This is the first and the last time that God strikes someone in the New Testament like this.

But what we do find in Scripture is a God who does not chuckle or wink at sin. We find a God who takes our lives very seriously, seriously enough to send his only son to die for us. In our first Scripture we find a similar scenario with Miriam and Aaron. Remember, Moses has been leading the people out of Egypt, across miles and miles of land. People are starting to get grumpy and then his brother and sister start thinking that they have a better plan because they don't like his wife. They decide that God doesn't just speak to Moses, just because of the cloud that always surrounds Moses when God speaks, but they also should be able to make decisions for the people. Who died and made Moses leader anyway?

Well, God doesn't like that and in verse 9 we read that God's anger was kindled against them. Just so you know, whenever you read that God's anger was kindled against them, usually not good things happen to those people. Look what happens, Miriam gets punished, don't read into it, but she gets leprosy. Both Aaron and Miriam cry out to Moses and say literally: do not lay sin on us. Basically, don't punish us, it wasn't that big of a deal. Can't you do something? Why don't you go after someone who is a murderer or something? Moses cries out to God on behalf of his sister. Do you hear God's response? She sinned, she went against God's elect and so in essence went against God.

Their sin, their infidelity, their questioning and going behind Moses' back for an issue of a wife that they didn't like, was seen not so much as a sin against Moses as it was a sin against God. They did not trust the leadership of the community and so they looked at themselves as people who could make decisions better than God could. This sin affected not just Miriam, and Aaron, and Moses, that first family, but it affected the whole community. In vs. 15 we read that everyone had to wait, the whole nation of Israel had to wait, before they could get to the promised land.

The nominating committee is getting very close to finishing up its work to find new leaders of this congregation. Isn't it interesting how our session, our elders, who make the decisions for the church, are supposed to be the ones called by God to make decisions and you as a congregation are called to trust them and believe that the decisions that they are making is not for the sake of any individual, but for the sake of the kingdom of God. It is serious business when you describe yourself as a Christian, as a member of the new community, much is expected of you, but great is the reward.

We next move to the New Testament Scripture, and we see just how serious this fellowship is. Notice, like Miriam and Aaron, both people are involved. Now keep in mind the point is not that they were struck down because they didn't give enough money. No, they were struck down because they lied about how much they made. They were not honest with the leadership and so in turn were not honest with God.

Peter says, it was your land, you didn't have to sell it. You could have kept whatever you wanted but you lied to us, but ultimately you lied to God. BAM! We see that this Scripture ends with the words: and great fear seized the whole church. No kidding! Next week we are going to see that because of the great fear that these events created people from the outside stopped joining the church. I think these verses show us that the 1st century church was not perfect, they were dealing with issues as a community just as much as the individuals in that community were dealing with issues.

Our church is one filled with sinners. I was speaking with some of the staff and pulled out some of the skeletons that we have in our closet that are not pretty at all. When you join First Presbyterian you do not take a purity or sobriety test and we don't check you for greed or pride. We have people in this community who are right now struggling with sin that is in danger of taking over their lives. Adultery, alcoholism, abuse, slandering others with words. These issues are not just their business, it is our business because they are a part of us. Their choices could destroy lives and their behavior affects all of us. This is serious business being in a community. It is easier to shun and keep those people out, even if sooner or later those people become me and you. But at least for the time being it might be easier to not face it head on.

A new community does not take sin lightly. This is hard to hear, it is even harder for me to say it, but we must speak truthfully to each other about the way we live, the way we speak, the way we think, the way we treat each other, the way we spend our time, the way that we view other people.

The truth is, part of the joy of being in the new community is knowing that the sin that we do have, we are able to give to Christ and start all over in a community that will hold us accountable, create a structure and a system of accountability where we can grow. We are able to be a part of a community that is called to confront lies. The lies that we find in society that deal with sexuality, materialism, racism, sexism. The lies that often seep their way into the church and when that happens we often don't call them sin, but rather doctrine.

But we can band together, and we must, because this is a real church where on any given Sunday you will find both faithfulness and foolishness sitting side by side. There are real people struggling in a real world trying to be faithful with all of the odds against them.

Have you ever felt that there is a bit of a disconnect between what we do here, and what we hear here, and how we act here and then when we leave these walls what goes on out there? What happens in our faith and our growth must be able to be applied in our every day lives.

Our lives, whether good or bad are a reflection not only on you, but your family, also your church but ultimately on God. Miriam and Aaron made a bad decision to go against Moses and God took it personally. Ananias and Sapphira go against Peter and God takes it personally. Being a part of the New Community is fun, but it is also serious business.

Sometimes the Adams and Eves are us, dejected because we sinned and got kicked out of the garden, or we are the Miriams and Aarons who doubted and wanted to be first in place of God, and we are suffering for it. Or maybe we made a decision like Ananias and Sapphira that not only affected us but our whole family and our community.

Feel the embrace of the community. Know that we are willing to help and show that it is much better to be held accountable for our actions rather than flounder in uncertainty and sin. And in case you haven't noticed, when you look around you, don't be fooled, we too have been known to be unfaithful to God every now and then. Amen.