

Sermon Text for July 28, 2019

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Exodus 8:16-19, Acts 13:1-12

"Don't mess with the missionary man"

We had a wonderful time last weekend in upstate New York with all of our daughters, our only time this summer that all of us will be together outside of Strasburg, so it was fun. Stacy and I loved to see the girls together without us just chatting and being sisters. It makes me think of my brothers and I. One year we had our annual Bronkema family tournament which was a three day grueling affair of 36 holes of golf on Thursday thru Saturday. Then Sunday we ran the Disney Half Marathon and followed that up with a final 18 holes after the half marathon. I learned a very important lesson that year. I was playing more golf than my brothers, I also trained very hard for the half marathon, almost becoming somewhat obsessed by it in my training. My others brothers saw it as something fun and interesting but didn't train half as much as I did. I learned one important lesson: No matter how hard you prepare for something, at times it just doesn't matter. I came dead last in the golf, and dead last in the half marathon.

In spite of that every year we so look forward to this golf tournament which of late has moved to Puerto Rico in February. We so love being together in this competitive yet bonding time. You see we grew up together on the mission field and we have stories and these stories have held us together as a family. Stories of our ancestors who served as missionaries and imparted in us this sense of wherever you are it is your home and it is where God is going to use you. This type of lesson seen in my grandfather a missionary in the Congo who died as a young father while on the mission field opening doors for people to come to Christ through their work. No matter where we find ourselves, we consider our work as mission, as being sent out by God in whatever field we are in to reach out to people to fall in love with Christ.

This church sees itself on a mission. Sometimes we feel that we are a Christ-like colony training and maturing slowly but surely in an at time hostile new land as things change around us but we continue to reach out and risk, claiming more and more of this community for Jesus. And here's something I believe. I believe that this new church year could be the best, most productive year ever for the church. I really do. With everything that we have put in place, with the team that we have built, with the programs we have. We've had some awfully good, good years over these past 187 years, but I think 2019-2020 will be one of our best.

This week we look again at Acts and the first great missionary journey of Paul which we

will find can very easily parallel our own missionary journey for this year if we would trust in our Lord.

READ SCRIPTURE

We've talked before about Acts being an account of the early church and in particular its missionary history and heritage. Remember what church was the primary missionary church which sent people out onto the mission field? Not Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the mother church, like our Louisville which had all of the administration and power. Remember Antioch was the church devoted and dedicated to sending out missionaries. And sure enough we begin our Scripture with two missionaries being sent out from Antioch.

Just a reminder that earlier in Acts Jesus gave a command to his disciples, and in reality to all of us, to go out into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Look at that in chapter 1:8. And sure enough that is where Acts has us today, and I think where First Presbyterian finds itself today as well. First Presbyterian is a mission minded, mission sending church. We have not hesitated to reach out in our local community where we encourage those in need to come through our doors as we welcome them in our New Beginnings house, our food pantry and so on. We aren't satisfied just with sending money around the nation and the world, which we do. We'd be here a long time recounting the ministries, the missionaries, and the missions that we support and have supported over the years. This mindset not only helps those who receive the support but also helps us to more clearly define who we are as a church and individually. We are missionary men and women in all that we do.

Now Paul in his journey and in all of his mission trips travels about 10,000 miles during his life. That is no small feat. When we sent out the Garners to serve they traveled about that distance in a very short time, but we have airplanes and cars and trains, but Paul didn't, he traveled on boats, and primarily on foot. Now who remembers what happened after he spoke in the service? That's right, the church sends them, commissions them just like Paul and Barnabas are commissioned today in this Scripture. We encouraged you to come on up and lay your hands on them just like what happens when Paul and Barnabas are commissioned, we believe that something providential happens every time we lay hands on someone. We believe that the Holy Spirit moves in their lives in a way that it would not if we had not laid our hands on them. Look at the first 3 verses here.

Paul and Barnabas are sent out on a mission. Look at vs.3 and we see that in the middle of the worship service there is fasting, praying and the laying on of hands. We do the same

thing. For over 2,000 years people have been commissioned by the church and by churches to do the Lord's work wherever they find themselves just as we did for the Garners and as we do every year for our elders and our deacons. The church has been sending out missionary men and women by laying on of hands for generations. You who have been ordained to do that work, elders and deacons who have served in this church, you are missionary men and women. Each one of you can consider yourself as a piece of this magnificent puzzle and tapestry that God has woven together over the years.

We see it all over Scripture, we see it here in Acts. The laying on of hands is a sign of God's power that you do not and cannot have on your own. In these verses 4 times the Holy Spirit is mentioned as being at work. The Holy Spirit sets apart Paul and Barnabas, he is the one who chooses them. The Holy Spirit sends them out. Paul is filled with the Holy spirit which gives him the courage and ability to speak to truth. We will look at this later. Suffice it to say that each one of us is sent out into the world for a specific purpose which the Holy Spirit will reveal to us.

But a strange thing happens to Paul and Barnabas on their way to their mission assignment. The first thing we see in vs. 9 is that Saul is called Paul. He gets a name lift. You know, if you are going to be the most effective in your mission for Christ, it helps to be clear about who you are, to understand your identity, to understand who God created you to be. Sometimes it is hard. Sometimes we are raised to be something else. We are expected to be something else. It is not easy to turn your back on other people's expectations. Some of you may have been living out your lives trying to fulfill other peoples' dreams, your parents, or spouses, or work or another group of people.

Here Paul is living out his names which he has been given by the Almighty God to clarify that his identity belongs to Christ first and foremost. Sooner or later, hopefully, you came to this point that Paul reached where you are able to say: "This is who I am. This is who God created me to be. I must be faithful to my call. Who are you created to be? Why do we pretend to be someone or something else when God calls us to be his children?"

When you embrace your missionary man or woman identity and the name that comes with it you are able to do amazing things and live a life that is willing to live completely not afraid of potential risks because you know God has your back and anyone who comes up against you has not just you, but the one who named you, Jesus Christ to deal with.

We find this in Exodus where Moses and Aaron are totally outnumbered and outmanned

with Pharaoh and his magicians, but with the power of God they are able to conduct a miracle through God's work. What is an example that the Holy Spirit can empower you to do. How does God have our backs. This is a great story in Scripture. It is a story about competition between the God that we worship and the pagan gods that people in Scripture used to worship. You remember the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. They built a big pyre of wood and Elijah said to the prophets, pray to your God and see if he can bring down fire. It doesn't succeed and Elijah says, this is the Scripture, maybe he is relieving himself which is why he can't come right now. Step aside, let me show you what my God can do. And bam the fire came down and not only burnt up the wood but all the false prophets as well.

At vs. 9 we have a similar competitive god story when Elymas, a New Testament false prophet, challenges Paul, and Paul was trying to be nice but finally he had enough. You don't want to mess with the missionary man.

Paul looks Elymas straight in the eye, stares him down. What follows is one of the most royal tongue lashings and reamings that you will find in the Bible. Paul says to him: Listen, vs10 go on a read this in Scripture.

So I think the lesson is clear. The next time someone disapproves with you or opposes you, look them straight in the eye and say: you son of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right and good. I think it might work. I do love this though. I love the permission it gives us to be gutsy. Whatever it means to turn the other cheek it apparently doesn't mean that when we find the Gospel being perverted or distorted or blocked, that we can't rise up, look the problem right in the eye and call it what it is.

One of my favorite sayings which I don't abide by as much as I should is: move toward the problem. This is not our instinct is it? Most of us like to avoid problems, avoid conflict. Especially in the church. We want to be nice, and loving. But there are times when we may be called to silence opposition, to stand up to bullies. Jesus did it in the temple and Paul did it here.

It is part of claiming our identity as missionary men and women sent out by this church to be gutsy in the face of conflict and the future. If you claim that truth for yourself, you will find God blessing you continuously. May God bless us as we seek to do His will. Amen.