

Sermon Text for September 29, 2019

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Judges 4:17-22, Acts 16:11-15

“Can God use me?”

So how about that first Scripture? Not one we would traditionally use on a Sunday morning. There are a lot of reasons why we don't read this kind of Scripture a lot. The detail that is involved is pretty gory and not very appetizing. The last 90 Day Challenge that we did together a number of you asked me about the incessant killings and the slaughter that took place at the hands of the people of God. That isn't something that I want to encourage so it is not something that we read about often.

But the point behind these verses is actually seen in vs.23 where we read: “So on that day God subdued King Jabin of Canaan before the Israelites.” God is the one who is able to use us for God's purposes. Not only is God able to use us, but God desires, really wants to use us for God's purposes.

This church is filled with people who love to gather together as a family. It is kind of like a tailgate party before a football game. There are those who bring something and those who kind of show up and eat the food and drink the coke. Or it is like spectators and players. God wants all of us on the field, on the team playing and working hard and not just in the stands as spectators wondering what the play might be.

But I get it, spectators often don't think they have what it takes to get on the field. They see those around them and say, I'm not fast enough, I'm not strong enough, I can't visit as many people as she does, I'm not as spiritual as that person, I'm not as moral as that one. Today, we are going to learn that not only can God use us but God wants to use us. As a spectator you are only getting a small dose of what a full life in Christ can actually be like. Every person here should be involved in some way in the life of the church other than just coming to worship on Sunday morning. Let's read more about that.

READ SCRIPTURE

So we have been following Paul and the Apostles now for some time in Acts. Up to now he has been with Barnabas in Asia Minor, planting churches in places like Antioch. Today he goes in a different direction. It is helpful to look at a map for today as we make our way through his journey in this Scripture.

This is his first foray into Europe. He arrives today in a city called Philippi which is called a leading city of Macedonia, even if it is not the capital city of Macedonia. It is a Roman

colony which is important later on because Paul was a Roman citizen so in these colonies you had a certain freedom that others did not. You didn't pay taxes, you had a bit of diplomatic immunity for crimes committed.

Paul stays there a few days. Now keep in mind that where Paul traditionally went while he was in cities was to the synagogues because in the 1st century Christianity was thought to be an offshoot of Judaism, almost like just another denomination within the Jewish religion and not a religion in its own right. So Paul over these days was probably looking for the Jewish community in Philippi.

But there wasn't much of one there to the point where there probably wasn't a synagogue due to there not being a big enough Jewish community. So Paul goes down to the river to pray outside of the city walls and there he found a group of Jewish women who were gathered there together. What kind of a Jewish followers? They were all women Jewish followers. And it is here where he meets this woman who is given a name in this Scripture, and her name is Lydia.

It is not as shocking to us today as it would be in the first century to notice how incredibly progressive the early church was in the way that women played primary roles. The church was absolutely on the fringes of any movement in that someone were given responsibilities far beyond what was seen or expected in any other organization of that time. The church was not only a leader in this field but a pioneer.

Do you remember who wrote the book of Acts? That's right, the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke. We find in Luke the women who witness the resurrection and never leave Jesus' side. It is the women in Luke who attend to his burial. It is the women in Acts who go to the tomb on Easter morning and so then become the first evangelists. Within the Christian community of the first century women could be a part of this movement without permission from their husbands. In I Corinthians 7:13 women are given permission by Paul to divorce their husbands if he is a pagan and an unbeliever. This is unheard of in the 1st century. I can't stress enough how God was able to use people in the first century, here specifically women, that had no role and no freedoms in their culture.

From the very beginning of this movement that we call Christianity God has used people that the rest of culture and society have marked and deemed as being without value. To those who have questioned can God use me God has consistently answered with a resounding: YES.

This is true in our first Scripture where Jael is seen as an integral part of God's plan, even the protagonist who is used by God to fulfill God's purposes. In chapter 5 Deborah, you know, the judge, the ruler, the prophet, the general, the servant of the Lord, sings about Jael as the most

blessed of women and not because she was demure and worthy help mate, but because she drove a tent peg through the head of a man who was the enemy of God's people. Now that is strong!

I want you to notice how Lydia acts or what Lydia does when she is approached with the Gospel message. What is the first thing she does? Look at vs.14. She listened to Paul and those with him. Two times it says in these verses where she is mentioned that she listened and the second time that she listened eagerly. Lydia listened but then she acted. It went this way: She listened, she was baptized (and her whole family but we will talk about that tomorrow), she was baptized, she extended hospitality.

As you spectate at this church I hope and pray that listening is a part of your relationship with us here at the church. If it is then I pray and I hope that your Spirit will be moved to walk with God in a relationship where Jesus is more than just a name but rather someone with whom you have an intimate relationship.

When those two things take place like they did for Lydia, that you listen and open your heart to God for him to enter in, then you are able to choose hospitality. That's one way to be used by God. You could choose to work in the nursery during Sunday School, or help out during a worship service. Some churches have a plan where you worship at one service and then you serve at another service. There are so many ways to be used by God, and all of us is able to be used.

Let me tell you a story about the Lampeter Fair that has nothing to do with being used by the church, but does have to do with being used by God. Tobias Lehman is pretty sick and will be having surgery this week. The community has rallied to help the family in a variety of ways as they face this horror. At the fair on Friday two animals were sold for Tobias and they each were over \$5,000 which was more than what the top steer went for at the auction. Then they had a time where people could just bid with their card and each bid was a \$50 donation to Tobias and his family. They raised over \$8,000 with that. An announcement was made at the fair that if people did not have a chance to help out at the family they could donate with a check at the gate. Another \$4,000 was raised. In all over \$23,000 was raised because people felt like they had something that could be used to help an individual.

Let me tell you something. Every person has something here that will help not just an individual but an entire community. Your time, your effort, your ability to plug in holes that we need for the work of this church is crucial. A church is not a church without people listening, making a commitment to Jesus Christ, and reaching out in service. God can use you, God wants

to use you. When you allow God to use you then the fullness of your relationship with Christ will be realized. Amen.