

Sermon Text for January 5, 2020

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Jeremiah 31: 31-34 1 Peter 1: 13-16

“The Year of Living Disciplined.”

I hope you all had a great Christmas and New Year celebration. We had a wonderful time out in Washington State visiting all of Stacy’s family. It was the first time in 6 years that all of our family and all of Stacy’s family was there, 10 cousins for our girls, so it was a real celebration. While I was out there I got into conversations with my brothers in law about how are we doing with keeping in shape, and I said not well. But I felt better because none of them were doing any better either.

I am not the most disciplined person, in fact, I would say, it is one of my many obvious weaknesses. I spend too much time on my phone, I try to set schedules to run consistently and I break more schedules than I stick to, I try hard to be disciplined, and when I have to I am, but if I were given I choice, I am not. But discipline is required in all matters of life.

You have to be disciplined at your job or else things start to slack off. I am so grateful that I was reminded a few months ago about sending out the enews and how that is a fairly vital line of communication for our congregation. There was nothing wrong, just that my discipline had slacked off. You have to be disciplined in your marriage. Being in a relationship with your best friend takes time and effort and work, it doesn’t come naturally, and it absolutely takes discipline. If you think you can coast through your marriage, well, you should know better. It takes discipline in life to be fulfilled. You have to work at it and even do things that you don’t want to do in order to be a better person and in order to have others see you as a child of God. That takes discipline.

The same is true for your faith. It takes discipline to live out fully and completely the life of faith, the fullness of what God wants from us and wants for us. It takes work. What we do today, which we do every year on the first Sunday of the year, is an attempt in the Covenant Renewal Service, to take part in an act of discipline meant to give you something tangible and concrete to agree to, and sign, so that you take this year more seriously and you see it as a year of living disciplined. Let’s see how we do.

READ

These two Scriptures are classic Scriptures when you talk about the covenant that we have between us and God. In Jeremiah we read about how in the Old Testament, before Jesus came along, our covenant with God was built upon our actions and our obedience, basically our discipline. How disciplined we were to refrain from doing the do nots, then the more successful we were in following the covenant and having a full relationship with God. The law was built upon our success and our ability to do good things. That was the Old Testament. But we read in vs.33 that we broke that law, that we consistently were unfaithful to God. As Jeremiah states, we were like a bride who was consistently unfaithful to their husband and broke the covenant more than they kept it.

But Jeremiah foreshadows the covenant that was established when Jesus came upon this earth and brought a new covenant. He states that this covenant will be written upon our hearts so it will be an unconditional covenant, one where it no longer depends upon our actions, upon our obedience, upon our discipline, thanks be to God! Rather, this covenant is going to be written upon our hearts. This covenant of salvation will be exclusively the act of God. We are recipients of this grace, we are recipients of the forgiveness provided to us by Christ on the cross, our sins will be washed clean as a result of God's action, and not as a result of our action. Our relationship with God no longer depends upon our discipline. This is good news people, for me, this is very, very good news, and I'm thinking if you weren't Presbyterian I would have gotten a few Amens out of you because I'm guessing some of you are in the same boat I am in, undisciplined.

When we turn to our New Testament reading we once again read about the covenant that God has established with us and it is once again emphasized that it is not based upon our discipline. How much God loves us is not dependent on how much we love God. It is a gift so our discipline does not dictate the degree to which God sees us as His children.

So I know that some of you upon hearing that just might be thinking, okay then, I'm good. If God does all the work then I don't have to be disciplined, I can just soak in all of God's grace and forgiveness and coast. But what we have been hoping to accomplish together as a family is to try to understand how do we live fully and completely and live out the goals and dreams and hopes that God has for us. Not how do we skate by with eternal life and then what happens on this earth doesn't matter. It does matter. Life is meant to be lived in full communion with God, not just a one way gift with no response from us.

So today, from our Scripture in I Peter we are going to be equipped for a year of living disciplined, not as a way to eternal life, but as a way to have a full life in full communion with our God. Peter gives us three things that we can do, if we are disciplined, in order to live fully that salvation that we have already received. All of these things are taken from vs.13, the very first verse of what we read today.

First we read that we are to gird our minds for action. Prepare yourself for action, be ready for it. Another time that we read about girding ourselves, this time our loins, was in Exodus 19 where the Israelites were preparing themselves to leave Egypt and to make their journey together toward the promised land. You are not going into battle but on a journey, much like the Israelites, from bondage to this culture and this way of living, into complete freedom in Jesus Christ. This journey this year should fundamentally change you and your relationship with God. So get ready and expect it.

The second aspect is discipline yourselves. We have been focusing on this for the entire sermon. We know what is causing anxiety and stress in our lives and often we are unwilling to deal with it. Look at those areas of your life where you want to do better and set goals to be disciplined with your wife, your job, your children. Do as I say, and not as I do, you can do better than you did last year.

The final aspect and focus that I want you to have this year comes from vs.13 as well, focus all of your hope on Jesus. Discipline is not going to give you everything. If you have a problem with alcohol then trying harder and being more disciplined may not solve anything, you need help, you need someone to hold you accountable. Here we see that if we set Jesus as our only hope, and not our skill or our ability, then that will be a game changer.

In I Peter the verses end with holiness being our goal, because God is holy. But for some of us life is just too difficult to have God only recognizing perfection. We can't be perfect so why establish a goal that we know from the outset we will never achieve? But I want you to hear this as an encouragement, strive for perfection. This is not a condemnation, but an encouragement to reach for that which is not attainable by yourself. Because, today as the list of obligations and demands on our time seem impossible to manage, God is often the first to be let go.

But not this year, this year will be the year of living disciplined. Join me now in the Covenant Renewal Service.

PROCLAMATION

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
the Christian life is redeemed from sin and consecrated to God.

Through baptism, we have entered this life
and have been admitted into the new covenant
of which Jesus Christ is the Mediator.

He sealed it with his own blood, that it might last forever.
On the one side, God promises to give us new life in Christ,
the Source and Perfecter of our faith.

On the other side, we are pledged
to live no more for ourselves but only for Jesus Christ,
who loved us and gave himself for us.

From time to time we renew our covenant with God,
especially when we reaffirm the Baptismal Covenant and gather at the Lord's table.

Today, however, we meet, as the generations before us have met,
to renew the covenant that binds us to God.

Let us make this covenant of God our own.

INVITATION

Commit yourselves to Christ as his servants.
Give yourselves to him, that you may belong to him.
Christ has many services to be done.

Some are more easy and honorable,
others are more difficult and disgraceful.

Some are suitable to our inclinations and interests,
others are contrary to both.

In some we may please Christ and please ourselves.

But then there are other works where we cannot please Christ
except by denying ourselves.

It is necessary, therefore,
that we consider what it means to be a servant of Christ.

Let us, therefore, go to Christ and pray:

Let me be your servant, under your command.

I will no longer be my own.

I will give myself to your will in all things.

Be satisfied that Christ shall give you your place and work.

Lord, make me what you will.

I put myself fully into your hands:

**put me to doing, put me to suffering,
let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
let me be full, let me be empty,**

**let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and with a willing heart
give it all to your pleasure and disposal.**

Christ will be the Savior of none but his servants.
He is the source of all salvation to those who obey.
Christ will have no servants except by consent;
Christ will not accept anything except full consent
to all that he requires.
Christ will be all in all, or he will be nothing.

Confirm this by a holy covenant.

To make this covenant a reality in your life, listen to these admonitions:

First, set apart some time, more than once,
to be spent alone before the Lord;
in seeking earnestly God's special assistance
and gracious acceptance of you;
in carefully thinking through all the conditions of the covenant;
in searching your hearts
whether you have already freely given your life to Christ.

Consider what your sins are.

Consider the laws of Christ, how holy, strict, and spiritual they are,
and whether you, after having carefully considered them,
are willing to choose them all. Be sure you are clear in these matters, see that you do
not lie to God.

Second, be serious and in a spirit of holy awe and reverence.

Third, claim God's covenant,
rely upon God's promise of giving and grace and strength,
so you can keep your promise.

Trust not your own strength and power.

Fourth, resolve to be faithful.

You have given to the Lord your hearts,
you have opened your mouths to the Lord,
and you have dedicated yourself to God.

With God's power, never go back.

And last, be then prepared to renew your covenant with the Lord.

Fall down on your knees, lift your hands toward heaven,
open your hearts to the Lord, as we pray:

COVENANT PRAYER

(The people may kneel or bow if they so choose)

O righteous God, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,

**see me as I fall down before you.
Forgive my unfaithfulness in not having done your will,
for you have promised mercy to me
if I turn to you with my whole heart.**

God requires that you shall put away all your idols.

**I here from the bottom of my heart renounce them all,
covenanting with you that no known sin shall be allowed in my life.
Against your will, I have turned my love toward the world.
In your power
I will watch all temptations that will lead me away from you.
For my own righteousness is riddled with sin,
unable to stand before you.**

Through Christ, God has offered to be your God again
if you would let him.

**Before all heaven and earth,
I here acknowledge you as my Lord and God.**

**I take you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for my portion,
and vow to give up myself, body and soul, as your servant,
to serve you in holiness and righteousness all the days of my life.**

God has given the Lord Jesus Christ
as the only way and means to coming to God.

**Jesus, I do here on bended knees accept Christ.
as the only new and living Way,
and sincerely join myself in a covenant with him.**

**O blessed Jesus, I come to you,
hungry, sinful, miserable, blind, and naked,
unworthy even to wash the feet of your servants.**

I do here, with all my power, accept you as my Lord and Head.

**I renounce my own worthiness,
and vow that you are the Lord, my righteousness.**

I renounce my own wisdom, and take you for my only guide.

I renounce my own will, and take your will as my law.

Christ has told you that you must suffer with him.

**I do here covenant with you, O Christ,
to take my lot with you as it may fall.**

**Through your grace I promise
that neither life nor death shall part me from you.**

God has given holy laws as a rule of your life.

**I do here willingly put my neck under your yoke, to carry your burden.
All your laws are holy, just, and good.
I therefore take them as the rule for my words, thoughts, and actions,
promising that I will strive
to order my whole life according to your direction,
and not allow myself to neglect anything I know to be my duty.**

The Almighty God searches and knows your heart.

**O God, you know that I make this covenant with you today
without guile or reservation.
If any falsehood should be in it, guide me and help me to set it aright.**

**And now, glory be to you, O God the Father,
whom I from this day forward shall look upon as my God and Father.**

**Glory be to you, O God the Son,
who have loved me and washed me from my sins in your own blood,
and now is my Savior and Redeemer.**

**Glory be to you, O God the Holy Spirit,
who by your almighty power have turned my heart from sin to God.**

**O mighty God, the Lord Omnipotent, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
you have now become my Covenant Friend.**

**And I, through your infinite grace, have become your covenant servant.
So be it.**

**And let the covenant I have made on earth be ratified in heaven.
Amen.**

Signature:

Date: