

Sermon Text for June 14, 2020

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

II Kings 4:1-7, Acts 28:1-10

“Not everything is as you would expect”

We find ourselves in the middle of June and I continue to want to know how you are doing. I hope and I pray that you have appreciated the extra effort that our deacons are putting out to ensure that every single one of you is reached out to and that efforts that our leadership is going through in order to deliberately, cautiously, and optimistically look forward to what comes next as we continue in our yellow phase which by all indications seems like we will be moving to the green fairly soon. What that means for us as a congregation is still yet to be seen, but we so appreciate your patience, your incredible resiliency, and your trust, yes, and your trust in the leadership of this church knowing that all that we do and all that we say it not driven by any unknown agenda, but rather by a care and a concern and a love for each and everyone of you. So, how are you doing, and I ask that really wanting to know.

Have you noticed how difficult it is to really understand what the current reality is around us? Nothing is as you would expect, that’s the title of my sermon, and I say that directed primarily toward people, no one is whom you would expect. I will never forget one of the first weeks that a new staff member at this church came on board and an incident that took place where I could teach him, hey, not everyone and not everything is as you would expect. First of all, it is not a current staff person, I can’t really tell you who it is just to be fair to him. He lives in Wisconsin, and his first name rhymes with Pet and his last name is a body part below your ankle. Anyway, I’m not going to tell you who it is.

One of his first weeks on the job and we were meeting in my office and this somewhat disheveled looking man came to my closed office door and knocked on it and this employee jumped up, obviously wanting to be helpful, and opened the door and with a big smile said: Are you here for the food bank? It turned out that he was actually a local Presbyterian pastor who was just stopping by to say hello. Not everyone and not everything is as you would expect.

How people look and what they say and other societal and environmental clues and cues help us to shape our thoughts and our feelings for that person. But these cues have over time been shaped much more by bias than they have been by the Holy Spirit breathing wisdom and direction into our hearts. We see someone and the cues around them and it leads to pretty strong assumptions on our part that oftentimes do not hold true, and those assumptions create barriers

and roadblocks for us to truly get to know and understand and love an individual for the person that they were created to be.

In both of our Scriptures today we find God working miracles in situations and in people that you would not expect. If walls had not been torn down or expectations revamped and completely discarded those miracles would not have been able to take place and the people involved would not have benefitted from the presence of the Lord in a powerful way. Let's read.

READ SCRIPTURE

This is one of those Bible stories that is pretty common and most of you I'm assuming have heard of this story before. If you haven't just a gentle reminder that you need to be reading your Bible soon. We will be starting back up another 90 day Challenge soon, a summer 90 day challenge, which I hope motivates you to read the Bible. But there are some details in this story that we often miss. The widow of a prophet is looking for help because her husband has left her in debt, the type of debt that was serious enough to endanger the lives of her children who are about to be sold into slavery. So this is pretty, very serious debt. You never hear a sermon on the deadbeat dad who left his wife and children with the kind of debt that would drive his kids to slavery, and we won't preach on that today. But from the beginning you see that things aren't as you assume they are when you approach this story.

Elisha doesn't give her money from his discretionary account but rather empowers her, a widow with children whose only solution in that day and age to survival would have been prostitution, to start a small business, a real entrepreneur, which was unheard of at that time. Yes, the miracle was the oil never ran out and that it kept flowing until all of the jars from their house and from their neighbor's houses were filled, but don't you also see a miracle in how she was empowered to do that which you would not have expected her to do? Sometimes the miracles that take place in Scripture aren't necessarily the feeding of the five thousand, but rather the bravery of the child to offer his lunch in the first place. We sometimes miss the miracles that are happening right in front of us because we think a widowed single mom can never start a business that is profitable and will provide her with what she needs for the rest of her life.

Not everything is as you would expect. You see that all over the Bible. People who do extraordinary things and they are exactly the type of people that we would not expect to do those things. A young boy slays a giant while his brothers in the military look on helplessly. A barely teenage girl becomes the mother of the Savior of the world and you never read about her parents or what kind of household she grew up in. A man thrown into the lions den and makes it out alive and all of the land worships the same God as his God simply because he made it out alive.

A criminal who was put to death in a state sponsored execution is the one that we worship. A symbol of torture in the first century is our symbol of faith.

Not everything is as you would expect in the Bible, you have to be careful when you read it to make sure you don't carry your preconceived ideas of the way the world works into the Bible, because if you do then you are going to miss that Savior who was led to the slaughter like a sheep before its shearers. We carry a lot of preconceived ideas while all along things really aren't as we think they are simply because they are exactly what they look like. We add nuance and innuendo and assumptions that tear down and are difficult to identify. A black man jogging through a new neighborhood is simply, a man jogging. A black man birdwatching in a park is simply a man birdwatching. A black woman relaxing on her couch after work is simply, a woman relaxing on her couch. When tragedy strikes we try to find reasons why there is more to the story to reinforce our preconceived ideas of who they are and what really took place. When all along we should be examining who we are and why things that really are as we expect, we distrust.

The people of Malta were unique in a number of ways. Paul and his crew land on their island. They must know by now that this was a prisoner ship, you know like one of those vans that travels throughout the state with the reinforced metal mesh in the windows with the big sign that says State Penitentiary. They knew Paul and his shipmates were criminals, and they could have made assumptions that they were dangerous criminals. But look at how they greeted them: vs.2, the natives showed them unusual kindness. The Greek word there is philanthropia, they didn't know who they were, they didn't have any preconceived ideas, they just knew that when it is wet and cold you build a fire and you invite everyone to gather around and get warm.

Something happens as they are warming themselves, something that they had seen in the past and something that fit their understanding that bad things happen to bad people. Paul gets bit by a snake by the fire and so their first assumption is that he is a murderer. They were right, in his former life he was a murderer, but they thought this was karma, I hate that word, Paul was getting what he was due because he had to be a murderer because a snake bite means in everyone's world view that the person who was bit was a murderer. Nothing happens to him, this person they don't even know, so he has to be a god. So in a matter of minutes Paul goes from murderer to god, simply because of the assumptions of the people who did not know him, but could only base their judgments on what was their reality around them.

But they come to find out that Paul is neither of those. They come to find out that things weren't as they had expected. And how did they find that out? Paul spent time with them, he

hung out with their leader, he healed a lot of people on the island. They developed a relationship with Paul and so all of those preconceived ideas that they had created in their minds were stripped away because of the time that they put into understanding and getting to know a stranger who was different from them. Once the people of Malta understood who he was and he was seen for who he was look how much the people learned and benefitted.

People of Malta, we are good people, we are hospitable, we love our neighbor, but we have preconceived ideas that have been built up in our communities, in our families, in our interactions. Last Sunday evening I led a Bible Study with the youth group and I gave them homework and I want to give you the same homework. I know, you are groaning right about now because my last homework I challenged you to go to Wal-Mart and the responses I got back were primarily, that is irresponsible because it is dangerous. Not everything is as you would expect. I have homework for you. I want you to identify in your life a person a color with whom you have a relationship. I want you to take the time this week to reach out to them and ask them to tell you how their lives living in America is different from your life because your pastor told you to do it. I guarantee you if you do that you will see that things are not as you would expect.

You are not calling to argue with them, you are not calling with your own idea of right and wrong answers, you are calling to learn from them. You are calling to learn from the body of Christ. Things are not as you would expect them to be. So being seeing things from the perspective of Jesus who understood what it meant to be beaten and abused and yet was able to say father forgive them for they know not what they do.

Jesus came to save us and to teach us how to live with each other. We'll accept the saving part but that living together part some of us are wanting to wait until we get to heaven to put that into motion. But our task as brothers and sisters in Christ is to identify that which is not as we would expect and claim it for what it is, an opportunity for us to learn from what we thought we knew. Amen.