

Sermon Text for April 25, 2021

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 34:4-10, Philippians 4:10-14 **“How to be nimble”**

Last weekend was a unique one for me. As you remember I had a couple of my brothers over, the fourth one of us wasn't able to make it. We grew up with a father who taught us how to play sports from basketball, to tennis, to ping pong. He had played professional basketball in Portugal and we all followed along and played in college. Whenever we are together, and I have shared this with you, we compete, no matter what we are doing, we compete, but it is healthy. We had the first annual Bronkema Olympics and it came down to the last event to see who would be crowned champion.

When you grow up competing, whether it is in sports, or academics, or farm shows, or whatever is you learn some incredibly important life lessons. Throughout the competition you learn that every small details makes a difference and makes an impact on what you are currently doing. If you don't stay focused for a little while it can cost you preciously. Like in life, if you are haphazard with your planning or with your execution it will become painfully obvious at some stage of the event or the program. In competition you learn what it takes to win and you learn how to win, hopefully, graciously.

But even more importantly, you learn how to lose. You can almost tell immediately when you are with someone and doing something that is somewhat competitive who has played a higher level of sports not so much how they win, but rather on how they lose. I know, trust me, I have done a lot of losing in my life especially as the youngest and the least athletic of the four boys. I lost in a vicious game of horse and as a result came in second over the Bronkema Olympics.

You see, in sports, and in any competition that you grow up participating in, you learn that whether you win or lose there is always another day that you will be able to participate in the same activity and who knows, maybe then, things could turn around. Your identity, your purpose is not tied up in the outcome. It is not our task ever to create a reality in which we will only be satisfied if our way of doing things is realized. Our identity and our reality and our sense of purpose always has to have as its end goal, and with prayer the end result, be tied up with God's desires even in less than desirable circumstances for us.

Paul's condition, like ours presently, was very much less than desirable. He did not want to be in prison. He did not want to have his life on the edge every single day. But he says that

he learned to be content with his lot in life, he learned to be content with his reality, and moved on, and looked for ways to ensure that God's desire be realized even in that condition. He did not put all of his resources in getting out of his present condition, but rather accepted it and poured all of his conditions in ensuring that God's will be done.

None of us want to be in this condition. None of us. None of us asked to be in this condition, none of us enjoys this condition. But it is the condition in which we find ourselves because we care about you and we love you more than we care about and put our identity in the way that we want things. Paul was able to proclaim that he was able to do all things in Christ because of that beginning point, he was content in Christ. When you are not content in Christ then you will never be content with the life that you are living and you will always be fighting to realize your identity by that which is happening around you as opposed to finding your identity in that which is happening within you.

Paul's ability to learn to be content in all things allowed him to be nimble and address any needs that would arise as a result of his contentment. Let's learn how he did that and see if we can do the same.

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We are going to look at Psalm 34 first. We started reading from vs.4 where we read that the first step in living is to seek the Lord. That doesn't tend to be our first step. As we find ourselves in situations of need our first step is to think, how do I get myself out of this. Only until it gets much later and much more intense and severe and potentially cataclysmic do we then invite the Lord into our presence and ask for Him to help. But here the Psalmist states that the first step in all things is seeking after the Lord. This applies to Paul, this applies to us, this applies to David as he finds himself in front of King Achish about to be killed. It's a long story, but it is one in which David feared for his life. This Psalm relays what he did in order to have his life spared. He sought the Lord.

Our first step in doing anything has to be seeking the Lord. This past week the CIC met and we were well on our path to envisioning a youth and senior center that would be open to the community operating out of the house on Funk Street. Last month I asked the committee to do nothing more, no more research, nothing more, just pray to the Lord that he would guide and direct us as we look to understand better what God requires of us. When we met Thursday evening it was fascinating how the discussion evolved.

We realized our task, what God is directing us to do is to have the most impact in the community as possible through following Jesus in our work in that home. We realized the only

way we could have an impact on the community is if we invited the community to imagine with us what that impact could be. The youth center idea was then transformed into trying to reclaim that which we used to have with the churches of the ministerium and maybe revive the model that we used to have that was the Powerhouse. But it also became clear that the best way to impact the community would be to provide a social ministry hub out of that house, but which could only be dreamed of in unison with the other churches of the community. A true Community Impact Committee. Not just a Presbyterian Impact Committee. That would be PIC and not CIC. This all came about as a result of seeking the Lord individually and then collectively as we gathered.

When that happens, David tells us, look at vs. 8, then you will clearly be able to taste and see that the Lord is good. The goodness of the Lord becomes evident to all those who participate. All those who seek refuge in him are able to experience the goodness of the Lord. This goodness, the Psalmist declares, then leads to an end to fear and debilitating conditions, whatever they might be. He uses the strong of this world who only rely upon themselves and their might and their focus on being first as an example of that which will not last. Listen to the Psalmist as he describes what comes: vs. 6, he sought the Lord. Vs. 7, In all of this you shall not want. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

The key in all of this is seeking after the Lord and then clarity comes to pursue him in all things so that you can face whatever comes your way. In short, it allows you to pivot from your current situation, whatever that might be, and by seeking the Lord you can be nimble and face with confidence, not the confidence in your ability or your might, but the confidence in the Lord, and nimble address whatever is in front of you.

Paul also gives a similar viewpoint in regards to seeking the Lord which puts you in a position to advance nimbly and with confidence based upon the promises of our Savior. He begins this Scripture with the focal point for all of our readings in Philippians up to this date. Rejoice! How is your joy today? Where is your joy meter today? If 10 is you are full of joy and 1 is you have run out, where are you today? Remember joy comes by looking at life through the lens of Jesus Christ and not through the lens of the pandemic or any other life event you have going on. Our joy and our identity is found in Jesus Christ.

The key verse that we will focus on today is vs.11 where Paul states that he has learned to be content with whatever he has. You are not born with the ability to be content. You are born and the first thing that you do is complain, you cry, you are hungry, you are cold, you are in a strange place from what you had known previously. But over time you learn to be content.

Experience teaches you to be content. Paul says he learned to be content with everything and with nothing, in sickness and in health, in wealth and in poverty, with abundance and hungry.

The reason we have to learn to be content is because everything around us points us in the direction of not being content. Culture and society tell us that we have to fight in order to assert ourselves and in order to have our way. We should never be content until we get what we want and the way that we want it. We are not born with the ability to accept that our life is in the hands of our creator, but rather those around us teach us that our lives are in our own hands and we can create and do anything that we want to do and become. But the caveat to that is to make sure that you put down those around you to realize your goals.

We are told that only the strong survive. But it is difficult to accept any condition in which you find yourself that you don't want to be in. We try to force our own wishes and desires upon all situations. Being nimble requires us to accept the current situation in which we find ourselves, whether we are happy with it or not, and then move forward from there. When Paul gives us the memory verse of Philippians 4:13 he is only able to do it after he has learned to be content. Christ will not be able to do all things in us if we are not content where we find ourselves. Contentment does not come about because of our life situation.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me can only come after we have arrived at a point in our lives where we are content in the state of our life. If you are not content with the state of your life then Christ will not be able to work wonders and miracles because you will get in the way by trying to put your desires ahead of God's wishes. We will inevitably try to force things to what they are not and what they should not be.

So what is it that gives you strength today? What makes you content today? Your financial security? Your health both physical and mental during this very difficult time? What gives you strength? Your ability to make your own decisions for yourself regardless of what is happening around you? What gives you strength? The psalmist says the young lions, those who think they are strong suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the Lord, those who are weak in the eyes of the world, well, they lack no good thing.

Only reliance upon Jesus will give you strength, contentment and the ability to nimbly transition to address whatever needs might arise around you. Amen.