

Sermon Text for September 11, 2022

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:6-8 ***“When world events impact our faith”***

Today we are not here to discuss an historic event that took place in the life of our nation. Even though it was an event that obviously impacted and affected us. We are going to do something a little different today, we are going to hear from each other because I'm guessing the stories you hear from this pulpit today are very similar to the story that you would have to share as well. Stories of how an event that took place around us affected us, impacted us, maybe even changed us and those around us forever. You are going to hear from 5 people and their 9-11 stories. Gavin, David, Rienna, Terry and Andrea, and Alice.

These are stories that we all share, stories that have shaped us. In our first Scripture, Malachi, the people of God were in the midst of a life changing event. They were in exile and God was promising restoration, but that restoration seemed very far off. The nation and its security had completely changed, because there was no security. Likewise in our second Scripture reading. The people of God, the disciples of Jesus Christ were also in the midst of a life altering historical event. Jerusalem had been destroyed, the temple had been torn down, and Nero, the Roman emperor was blaming the Christians and so they were on the run. Their lives had been turned upside down. In the midst of this crisis, their faith was being impacted, maybe in a similar way in which our faith has been impacted by 9-11. But in the midst of these sea changes culturally, politically, and even religiously, God has a message to his people. I have not changed, and if I have not changed, what is there to fear?

Fear, is there anything more pernicious and more altering in our lives than the presence of fear. Is there anything more that impacts our decision making more than fear. Is there anything that changes our faith more than fear. That is why Jesus said constantly, do not be afraid, but God knows that when fear is what drives us, when fear overtakes our decision making processes more than trust, well, then our faith surely is changed. Let's read our second Scripture.

READ

It should not come as a surprise when I say that historically faith has been impacted by life events. I mean this on a personal level, we will be singing the well known hymn it is well which was written after an unspeakable tragedy of the author losing his wife and children. We have the negro spirituals that came about as a result of our people living through the atrocities of slavery and framing their faith around their perspective of the presence of God even in the midst

of this tragedy. With 9-11 and now with Covid society and culture as a whole has been shaped by fear and world events more now than ever in my lifetime. And so the question we have to ask ourselves is how has our faith been impacted and changed by the historical events that we have lived through and that we are currently living through.

I'm guessing 21 years from now I am going to be asking some of these same people to come up here and share with the congregation how Covid impacted them and how did it impact their faith in God and I'm guessing we will hear some similar stories as well. Life event, world events tend to impact our faith whether we mean for that to happen or not. The times in which we are living now we are seeing it especially acutely.

Malachi was no stranger to cataclysmic world events. We mentioned this Scripture in our earlier sermon on tithing. We saw that the Israelites were in the midst of the most tragic historical time in their history, on par with their time of slavery in Egypt, this was their time of slavery in Babylon. They were as a nation and as individuals being changed by outside forces. It wasn't God who was shaping them with his promises, the people were having a hard time hearing that, but they could hear loud and clear the demands that the society around them was placing upon them.

But God does assure them at this time that even though it seems like everything around you is changing, God says, I do not change. I am still your shepherd, I am still your lamp unto your feet, I am still your gate, I am still your refuge, I am still your alpha and your omega. I have not changed at all and so you can rely upon me and my promises because no matter how much this world changes, I am the rock, the cornerstone that remains fixed and will always be there. You are my people even in the worst of times.

We see this lesson of the immutability of God in a number of other Scriptures. I want to walk you through them now, just to assure you as well as you are going through life now in a world that is changing so tremendously, that God has not and will not change and so then you can place your trust and your faith in this immutable God. I love that word immutable. It just rolls off the tongue and when you say it it makes you seem really smart. It means simply unchanging over time and unable to be changed. God does not change over time and God is simply not able to be changed.

Psalms 118:6 states simply: With the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can mortals do to me. With an immutable God on our side what can anyone do to us that would change the way that we think about God and the world. The answer should be nothing, but it often is not. Hebrews 1:10-11 states - , even while everything around us perishes, or changes God will

remain. God will not change. I feel that I need to repeat myself this morning just so that we don't forget it in the times in which we are living.

Romans 8:38 states: For I am convinced...nothing can separate us from the love of God. God does not change, he is always looking for ways to love us. God is on our side, who can be against us?

But world events tend to have an impact on us which is one of fear, even with all of these promises in Scripture that we find. A fear has crept into our culture that has driven out trust, driven out our desire to give others the benefit of the doubt which is what we ought to do as followers of Jesus Christ. We fear becoming a socialist nation, we fear a fascist takeover, we fear our democracy is falling apart and we fear that our way of life is being changed so dramatically that we have to burn books and erase history and have an alternate reality where facts and truth no longer matter. Only winning and being in power matters. That's our response to fear. Seeking more power at the expense of being a disciple, a follower of Jesus.

In Hebrews 13, our reading for this morning, the author makes a declaration that Jesus is the same now and forever. Jesus does not change. We read that our faith needs to be shaped by the promises of God that we have been hearing over and over again to combat the promises or the fear of culture that are vying for our time and our influence. Our faith needs to be shaped by our relationship with Jesus Christ and not by the fickleness, capriciousness or impact of world events. Faith needs to be impacted first and foremost by the vehicles of faith: Scripture, prayer, fellowship, worship. That is where our faith ought to be shaped.

The last verse in Hebrews 13 reads a bit different in the Greek than it does in the English and I want us to leave today hearing it the way it was supposed to be read and understood. In the Greek it should read: Jesus Christ, yesterday and today the same, and forever! If we believe that, if we have a relationship with this immutable God then our faith and our actions should not be shaped by what is happening around us, or the fear of self-preservation, or decision making based on circling the wagons and trying to be right at all costs. If we believe that Jesus Christ, yesterday and today the same, and forever, then we can live our lives in a way that fear does not dictate, but rather the presence of Jesus whose love for us overcomes all things. Amen.