

Sermon Text for October 23, 2022

By Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 91, II Corinthians 9:6-8 *“Enjoying the fullness of the Lord”*

It feels like a very long time since we have been together here in this sanctuary and worshiping our living, loving Savior Jesus Christ. It is great to be back together again. I shared with you a couple of weeks ago how powerful our two weeks in Iceland were. Bethany is doing great, in her element, loving being there and who knows, she just might spend a few more years there after this year.

But Iceland was truly an experience and a place where I could say I was able to visibly sense the fullness of the Lord in all of creation. I can only define it as an imminently violent country or island or location. Not the people, they were great, the island itself, the landscape. We saw the sea crashing against coastal cliffs, glaciers calving with force into an ocean bay. We experienced bubbling springs and 5 story high geysers erupting with enough boiling water to make your skin melt. We laid in a stream where this boiling water met with glacier water which allowed us to wallow in a natural hot tub. We saw waterfall after waterfall some as powerful as Niagara and others as delicate as a silk thread weaving its way down cliffs into the ocean. We walked on lava fields, both recently created and ancient ones with grass growing over it as its craggy, gnarly presence were meant to be there. The elusive Northern lights, which eluded us, are the closest thing to a direct sign from God. We experienced the biting violent winds which inevitably changes your schedule and stranded Bethany for a day on the other side of the island away from us.

I hate to speak about God's revelation apart from Scripture, but Romans 1:20 tells us that God will be and is revealed to us in nature and so we are without excuse. This is not a separate revelation. This isn't pantheism or nature worship, but the living, breathing, Trinitarian God was clearly evident. God is at work, has been at work, and will be at work you can see it clearly in God's creation in Iceland. The starkness of the Island also reminds you that you are not in control and that so much of your life is completely out of your hands and so we need an assurance of protection, and assurance of one who will keep you and allow no evil to befall you from fire and ice and wind and rain.

Both of our Scriptures today assure us that God's plans for our lives if we would just follow him, not merely believe in him, the demons do that and shudder, but follow him, we can experience the fullness of God as a result. Let's read.

READ

One of the central messages of this passage that we find clearly in the first verse that we read is that there is a risk – reward in experiencing the fullness of God. Last week at the ministerium service we saw Jesus' parables in Matthew and the risk reward in putting to work that which God has given you whether it be time or talents. We see a similar message today all tied in with this theme of enjoying the fullness of the Lord. Nothing is handed to you, you have to make choices. Here the choice is between sowing sparingly or sowing bountifully. Each of us is wired differently. Some of us are clear risk takers and others of us are clearly risk averse. It is not better to be one or the other, each come in handy at different times in our lives, but today we have to recognize that there is without a doubt a risk in being a follower Christ, a clearly defined risk that is repeated in Scripture.

Peter is asked to step out of the boat and walk to Jesus on the water, a risk he took and succeeded but then counted the risk and failed because he considered it too much. The Israelite priests were commanded to walk across the Jordan with the ark of the covenant but the waters would not separate until their feet got wet in the Jordan, which was risky, what if the waters did not part. They agreed to take the risk and on the other side of the Jordan was the promised land before them as the waters parted. A consistent message that we find in Scripture is that we cannot enjoy the fullness of the Lord without there being some risk and oftentimes what is at risk are those things that are most important to us.

I think it is somewhat ironic that we started our October tithing challenge and I don't show up for worship here at church for three weeks straight in October. That wasn't meant to be a drawing back on the challenge. But like walking on the water to Jesus and standing in the Jordan to arrive at the promised land tithing is also a clear risk and reward where you simply have to trust the promises of Scripture that if we follow Jesus in this area of our life then we will experience the fullness of the Lord in this way. If we do not, well then we can believe, but not experience the fullness of what God wants for us in our life.

We have said before and I will repeat it now that tithing is not so that we can meet the financial needs of the church, but rather so you can meet your own personal spiritual needs which includes enjoying the fullness of the Lord. In the New Year we will be offering FPU and

it has been a handful of years since we have done that. How many of you have taken FPU? It is a program that has made a significant impact upon so many in our church. A number of you have given me personal testimonies of how it helped some of you get out of a jam and most of you who took it to keep your finances in line through a Scriptural perspective.

But today I fully realize that risk reward is not a theoretical example, but when you have to go and fill up your oil tank and the cost of oil is near \$6.00 and you have to choose to only get 100 gallons instead of filling it up, it is no longer theoretical, it is real. This challenge is not meant to be intellectual but actually put all of us in a position where we recognize that this is a call to a different way of living, living in a way where we follow Jesus and not just believe in him. Keep it up and tell me stories of how you saw God or how you did not see God, I want to hear that too.

Psalms 91 is clearly an example of how God wants us to enjoy His fullness and lays out the fullness clearly in front of us. But it is not a green light to frivolous spending or living. Satan used this Psalm to try to convince our Savior that he could on a whim throw himself off a tower and so demonstrate that God would protect him and keep him and in pride demonstrate that he had the power that we all know he had. Jesus understood that this Psalm gave us an assurance of presence and protection, not a nod at comfort or wealth.

When we get to vs.8 in II Corinthians we see a key to enjoying the fullness of the Lord is this term contentment. I can't overestimate how important it is to set the example for our children and youth in regards to this specific topic. Teach your children well especially in this area of their life. Teach your children to be content with what they have and not always want to have more. This Bible presentation that we take part in every year is a step in giving our children a guide to following Jesus. We read that God is able to provide enough of everything. How many of us ever feel like we never have enough? That is a sin? If we are not able to be content with what we have when what we have is able to meet our needs, that is a sin. Our children feel our striving constantly when we feel like we do not have enough.

We have a promise in Scripture that God will provide enough for us, we can experience that. But if you spend all your money on beer, you won't have enough. If you have a \$300 TV bill and an equal cell phone bill then you won't have enough. If you spend \$500 a month on gambling then you won't have enough. If you use your money on that which is frivolous then you won't have enough. God will provide enough of everything for the purpose of being able to share in every good work. But if we are anxious about our finances then it is difficult to stay

focused on doing God's work. It is a distraction if we think we are without means and we don't have enough.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:11 "I have learned to be content with whatever I have." He then states in I Timothy 6:6 "there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment." When we are driven by the thought that culture helps grow within us that we never have enough then we will never be content. When we recognize that the fullness of the Lord and living and following Jesus is about being content with what we have, then everything changes. I wish I could make a distinction between believers and unbelievers in this category. I have met some who do not love Jesus who are far more content than some who claim to believe. Where are we on this continuum. Because even in this we are witness.

Paul finishes this Scripture by stating that when we arrive at the point of being able to be content with what God has provided it is for the specific purpose of being able to share abundantly in every good work, look at that in vs.8. But let's be clear. That I have a passionate desire to end hunger and housing insecurity in Strasburg will not automatically enrich me with the resources to do so. This Scripture also leaves room for spontaneous and almost irrational giving from the Christian response when they are faced with a need that they are called to address. Generosity within the body of Christ emerges from a relationship of believers to God. We have seen that here in this church time after time after time. Your generosity is legendary, I hope you have heard my encouragement to you on this topic. I have never served a more generous and sacrificially giving church.

But while legalism and generosity make ill companions, whimsical giving and structured tithing are our only true choices. There is no middle ground. So experiencing the fullness of the Lord does require risk, it does require even costly discipleship, even risking that which is most important to us. We cannot enjoy the fullness of the Lord without stepping out of the boat and getting our feet wet.