

# Sermon Text for November 20, 2022

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *Psalm 100, Hebrews 13:7-8*

### ***“Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today and forever”***

Brad Davis in his book: A history of the First Presbyterian Church of Strasburg, Pennsylvania 1832-2007 writes the following in the prologue when answering the question – to what can we attribute the success of this church: “It is due to the countless, dedicated people who invested their talents in the many programs offered by the church. More than this they wanted to exalt Jesus Christ.” Then speaking about the pastors who served he states: “In all they did, and in the sermons they delivered through nearly two hundred years, they insisted that ‘Jesus Christ is the same forever.’” Happy birthday First Presbyterian. This is going to be our theme for today. Jesus Christ is the same forever.

We find ourselves in a confluence of events. We are celebrating the birthday of the church and after 190 years you have to have a celebration. It is fitting that we are dedicating the organ today to the work of Almighty God as the generations before us did with other objects of worship. We lift up the generations that went before us their faithfulness which allows us as families and individuals to continue on in that tradition.

On our liturgical calendar it is Christ the King Sunday where we purposefully recognize that Jesus Christ is King. Jesus has to be Lord of our lives as individuals and Lord of this church through its programs and its decision making. It is one thing to recognize the Kingship of Jesus in our own lives, it is quite another to turn over the reigns of the church to the king and allow him to be at the center of the decision making and not our own desires or agendas.

It is also Thanksgiving Sunday. This week many of us will be gathering with our families to celebrate a time of giving thanks. The Bronkemas this year are travelling to Landisville with four members of 20 person crew not able to be there, the most who have not been there in the time that we have been doing this. It will be a celebration, but it will be different. So today we are going to try to see how all three of these life events are able to work together and fit together as we celebrate the birthday of the church, the fact that Jesus is King and has been King for these 190 years at least in this church, and a celebration of giving thanks that is seen in our families and in this country this week.

Both of our Scriptures focus on the faithfulness of God which is cause for celebration and the faithfulness of the church, which is also cause for celebration. We don’t spend enough time in this church giving thanks to those who have paved the way for us over the years. We find

ourselves in a unique position as a church where we are able to actually say thank you to people who have been part of this church, some for over 80 years, think about that, you can't say that about every church. So our Scripture today is going to help us do both those things, celebrate God's faithfulness and celebrate the pillars of this church.

## **READ**

Before you get to the first verse of Psalm 100 you can read its description and what it is entitled. It says very simply: A Psalm of Thanksgiving. Over the years this Psalm has been used on this Sunday, this Christ the King Sunday, as a Psalm to lift up the status of Jesus as our King, but in this country it serves as a double meaning on some years, and this is one of those years, where we celebrate that Jesus is King and that we are entering a week of Thanksgiving here in this nation.

The aspect of God being king that is uplifted is pretty obvious when we read: enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. This line in vs.4 highlights for us why we use this Psalm for Christ our King. But it also underlines the faithfulness of God for which we ought to be thankful every day of our life. We read this Scripture and sometimes it passes right through us and it doesn't mean anything to us. When we read that the Lord is good and his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations, do you see why we are reading this Psalm this morning?

Look around this room, look around this church, and you can envision people within this church who have had an impact on your lives. When we talk about the faithfulness of God to all generations we have an advantage here over most churches and that is simply because we can see God's faithfulness over the generations. We can interact with God's faithfulness over the generations. We don't have to just hear these words and say yeah, that's probably true at some level. We can actually interact with Elinor and Norma and Clayton and Sandy and see God's faithfulness at work in the past and even now in the present. It forces us to interact with each other knowing that God is good.

Here is what I want you to do. Look to your neighbor and one of you say God is good, and the other person responds by saying all the time. Then the person who said all the time says it again, All the time, God is good. I want to hear that ringing out here today. Bruce you and me, I'll start. God is good, all the time, all the time, God is good. Do you believe it? Look around this room and it should be a testimony to the goodness of God throughout the generations. We have people in this room who have seen and tasted the goodness of God over

the decades, over the generations and so if you don't believe it today, ask one of them, they'll tell you.

When the early pilgrims came to this land they understood themselves as being the people of God who were coming to a promised land much like the Israelites as they made their way out of Egypt and into Canaan. They were making their way out of an oppressive land and looking to start a new life on this land. Without trying to romanticize or idealize the pilgrims and what they did to the natives that were on this land already, we find ourselves giving thanks to God today for the time that we are spending in this land.

As they saw themselves as being a part of the history of God's people so we ought to as well. The generations that went before them so that they could find their way across the sea to here find a parallel to the generations that went before us and established this church and built a faith that is founded on Christ and Christ alone. This brings us to Hebrews 13 and identifying the generations that went before us.

Do you realize that Elinore Rudy in her 82 years of membership here at First Presbyterian has seen 17 pastors including both installed and interim pastors since she was a member here. She has seen more change in this church than anyone else alive. Now hear this stat. Over the past 46 years there have only been three installed pastors, or group of pastors in this church. That is extraordinary for any given church. Within our denomination the average length of time for a pastorate is 5 years. Now, the longevity of your recent pastors speaks more about you than it does about the pastors who served. I say this as one of those pastors.

While the pastors may have been faithful leaders to some extent, the longevity speaks to a membership who is able to focus on Christ as their first and only priority and allow the warts and all of the pastors to just be. Whenever you see a long pastorate, and especially a succession of long pastorates, the analysis is easy. That is a healthy church, that is a church who understands that Jesus is King and only Jesus is King. You are reflection of the faithfulness and the faith that ought to be emulated and history is a clear testimony to that. Now, before you get too big of a head so that none of you will be able to leave the sanctuary, the way that God has worked in this church, actually the way that you have allowed God to work in this church has been extraordinary.

When you read Hebrews 13:7-8, you hear in verse 7 the following words: Remember your leaders, those who spoke the Word of God to you, consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Remember your leaders, consider their way of life, imitate their faith. That's a lot of pressure to put on people who are just trying to do church together. On May 1,

2011 at my candidating sermon I said something like this: I promise you that I will work harder than any other pastor you've ever had. But I also promise you that if you put your hope in me and in me alone that you will be guaranteed to be disappointed. These verses make me uncomfortable.

These verses in Hebrews tells us to look at those who have gone before us, and even specifically the pastors, and use them as an example both of their way of life and of their faith. This year we will be bringing into leadership nearly 20 officers. Part of becoming an officer of this church is realizing the responsibilities and the calling that you have which is that people ought to be able to use your way of life as an example and people ought to be able to imitate your faith. Over the years the leaders of this church have used Luke 22:26 as an example of what leadership looks like. Let's read it: The greatest among you must become like the least, and the leader like the one who serves.

This is the example that has been set for us over these past 100 years. This church has survived on the one hand because of the faithful leaders that it has had. But it has also survived because these leaders understood that there was only one agenda on the table at every session meeting, at every deacons meeting, at every trustee meeting, at every congregational meeting, and that agenda is found in vs.8. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. Like the old hymn states: There is no shadow of changing with thee, Great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness, morning by morning new mercies I see. Jesus has remained the same over these past 190 years.

This statement isn't just a timeless theological proclamation but also a testimony to the unchangeable Gospel message proclaimed by past leaders of this church. Although the preachers change, the preaching must remain the same. The faith of the leaders has always been based on the Word of God, which finds its culmination in Jesus Christ. Our community is called to belief and to confess what has been preached. Do not be drawn to new teachings that take you away from Scripture. If someone were to ask you what is the one thing that your church preaches, I hope you could say: that Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.