

Sermon Text for July 23, 2023

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

I Samuel 24:1-7, Matthew 7:7-11 *“The ethic of righteousness”*

Stacy has been gone the last entire week and doesn't get back until Wednesday.

Someone asked me if I was looking forward to having her a way, you know a bit of a break, that whole distance makes the heart grow fonder. No, I don't ever look forward to her being away, we will be away from each other for 20 days in July and when we are away I don't sleep well, I don't eat well, I discovered I only brush my teeth because of the possibility of kissing her, too much information? Now if you were to ask her that same question..., I'm not sure she would answer the same way, I'm not the easiest person to live with.

Some churches wind down in the summer and then wind back up around the time that school starts. Yeah, not this church at all. We don't take a break from God or from activity or from pursuing righteousness as that which we want to do. Why would anyone take a break from what they love to do and from what drives them in life and gives them pleasure. We love, here at FPC, to do the will of God, we don't turn it on and turn it off as if we somehow need a break from doing God's will.

VBS just finished and so the intensity and the fun is behind us. Our mission trips are unfolding before us with the senior high having done theirs and now the middle schoolers are getting geared up to do theirs. Our food bank is in high gear with 4 new families already this month and an average of 80 bags of food per month. We continue to help people with their rent and their utilities and emergency needs through our Community Impact Committee. This church is wired to do God's will and pursue consistently an ethic of righteousness. But we are also encouraged to be, be in the presence of God without doing, lest we forget.

Scripture commands us to always pursue God, to seek, ask, knock and that is matched with this church's clarion call of know, grow, go, which next week we will kick off with our prayers, Scripture and action. Both of our Scriptures today point to an ethic of righteousness that we are called to pursue even while we live in a time and a place that tries to draw us away from that. Let's read.

READ

When we take a trip to the Holy Land one of the places that we visit are the springs of Ein Gedi. They are a pretty rocky and boulder landscape with caves throughout and you can

walk to where supposedly it is thought where David and his men hid from Saul. You may need to have a bit of the context set for the first Scripture that we read this morning. Saul is the King of Israel, and he is a bit jealous of David who killed Goliath and is one of his most valiant soldiers. He is jealous because the people cheer for him when he comes back from slaying their arch enemies the Philistines. Saul was a good warrior as well, but as we read in Scripture the people would say: Saul killed thousands and David killed tens of thousands. Saul was envious and jealous to the point where he seeks to kill him.

David flees with his soldiers to Belarus. I couldn't help but think of Prigozhin, the head of the Wagner group and Putin, where Putin pursues and will almost certainly kill his strongest military man. But that is where we find ourselves in this story. David flees from Saul and hides out in this rocky mountainous valley. Today, he has an opportunity. Saul enters into David's cave where he is hiding with all of his men, and this king finds himself in the most vulnerable of all positions as he goes to the bathroom. His men whisper into his ear that this is God putting his enemy in front of him so that he can kill him instead.

David's men use God as the source of this opportunity and encourage David to take an action that is against the will of God, but say that it would be justified because God put him in the position to do it. David knows better. David knows that God will never command us to do anything that is even slightly against his will just for us to gain some kind of temporary relief, or just so that the outcome will be that which we want. It is impossible for God to contradict Himself, and so God will never ask us to do something that is against his righteousness in order to obtain a result.

This is a really important concept that David's men were going against. Kill Saul because God has obviously put him in your path today. Killing Saul is wrong but they invoke God's name to justify it. We are often dragged away from ethical living when those around us might say that God is calling us to certain actions. But God will never contradict himself and will always be consistent. Killing Saul was both a contradiction and an inconsistency. We see that today where God is used in political circles today as a weapon as opposed to one who calls us to help the poor, and minister to the orphan and spend time with the widow. The ethic of righteousness is always the will of God, even in the smallest of things.

So David says no, and instead pursues righteousness and tries to bring about reconciliation. He knew that God would never ask him to do something that would move him away from righteousness in order to do what we want. What decisions are we facing where

maybe a short cut would provide us with what we think are desirable results in our life? Where do we think that maybe a small unethical action is justified because the end result might help more people? That is not how God works or how God thinks. That is not the ethic of righteousness. This Scripture teaches us that no, even if all those around you are losing their heads, you maintain your principles, you pursue the ethic of righteousness.

In our second reading Jesus lays the groundwork and provides the stability and the trust that propels us to pursue righteousness. It is so much easier to do the will of God when you trust in God. It is also so much easier pursuing the will of God when you know that God will provide what you need, which is a promise that he makes in Matthew 6, before these verses. Remember this in Matthew 6:33: Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you. What will be added? What you eat, or what you drink or what you wear, those things that we worry about the most, God will take care of. So if we believe this, if we trust that God is telling the truth, then we can pursue this.

If there is no trust, then there will more than likely be no righteousness in our life. But if we know trust, if we believe that Jesus will meet that which we need, then we will know righteousness and we will be freed to do his will. When we trust God we are freed to act as He wants us to act. The primary reason why we don't make decisions for God is that we don't actually believe that God will meet our needs.

William Carey, one of the most influential missionaries of all time, said once in a sermon: It is only when we expect great things from God that we begin to attempt great things for God. When I say that God will provide it ought to free us to pursue righteousness without any hesitation or contemplation of risk reward. God provides so let's pursue righteousness without any concern for the future. That is the way it ought to work. Missionaries learn this on the mission field because they are consistently thrust into situations where it is very obvious that things are completely out of their control and all they can do is trust that God will overcome, and He does, time, after time, after time.

But in this culture in which we find ourselves, like David's men, we hear the voices that say no one is going to help you so you had better help yourself. Or we hear the voice that everything is up to us and we can't trust anyone and our goal is to reach the top even if it means pushing others down. We live in a culture where the ends justify the means. Not in a promise that our needs will be met so let's get to work to meet the needs of those around us. That's the ethic of righteousness. Jesus is telling us here that only by asking, seeking, and knocking on

heaven's door through prayer will we ever be able to forego anger, retaliation, will we be able to love our enemies, forgive others who hurt us, and control our criticism of others. This is the ethic lived out.

So how much time in our life do we spend in prayer asking for God to be present, how much time did you spend this week in prayer? Or how much time did we spend seeking out the will of God in our life, or knocking on God's door as we spend time with those in need? On Friday I spent about 4 hours with Jack Crowley, the executive or president of Water Street. We were talking about ways in which First Presbyterian can partner with them. We have been partners with Dottie Smith now for a long time and Terry Sweigart is taking up that mantle as well.

We agreed that they would use us as guinea pigs to see how we as a church might be able to actively engage in reaching out into the community and expanding the already growing social ministries that we have. It is an exciting time in the life of the church as we look to live out this ethic of righteousness in our own personal lives and in our families, and also in the life of the church. But this ethic of righteousness is more easily pursuable when you trust. Trusting in the provision of God frees us for God's work. And God has provided to First Presbyterian through you, we have seen it time after time. As a result we have to make decisions as a church that reflects a trust that we have.

Jesus describes it using common sense terms and analogies. He says you know that a father is going to provide bread to a hungry child and a mother will provide a fish to a child who needs food. While this may be debated, Jesus says at the core it is almost second nature to trust your parents. How much more should we not trust God and that he will provide our needs? The first step in living out this ethic of righteousness is trusting in God, specifically that God will meet our needs. If we don't believe that then we will never be willing to reach out, truly reach out, to those around us because we will be so concerned with what we have and think that there is a limit to what we can do. God says no, there is no limit, do not limit yourself to what you can do because my provision is limitless.

That is what we find here in these Scriptures. What we are doing here is trying to build a trust in God that never wavers because then and only then we are freed to act according to His will. We need to live like we trust in God. That's not always easy, we read that in the Bible too. Paul in II Corinthians 12:9 does not get what he wants. He wants to have the thorn removed from him but it was not. Jesus doesn't always get what he wants, in Matthew 26:39 he prays to

have this cup of suffering removed from him, but he does not get what he wants. When we are faced with suffering and the life of tragedy, we have to maintain our trust in God's provision, even if we are in a cave not seeing a way out.

We don't always get what we want, and prayer is not meant to manipulate God for what we want. But if we expect great things from God, I promise you, when we attempt great things for God, God will respond in even greater ways. Amen.