

Sermon Text for October 29, 2023

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

II Kings 22:11-13, II Timothy 3:14-17 *“Scripture”*

Today is Reformation Sunday. If you have been in this church long enough you have figured out that I don't preach topics and follow fads or what is the hot discussion of the day. That may leave some of you disappointed, but we preach Scripture here and we preach as Paul said in I Corinthians 1:23, Jesus Christ crucified. But it is still Reformation Sunday and it would be ingenuine of me to say that the Reformation isn't an important time in history that bears mentioning. It was and it is.

Because of the Reformation and Luther's nailing, or some say he actually mailed the 95 theses, but whether he nailed them or mailed them, the Reformation has had an impact on us today. We are different people today than we would have been if the Reformation had not taken place. As a church, as a society, as a nation. This country is different because of the Reformation. And so much of who we are as Christians and who we are as Americans, our identity is wrapped up in the what took place in the Reformation. How we work and our concept of work as an act before God. Our outlook of hope and perseverance is and pick yourself up by your bootstraps is wrapped up in the thinking of the Reformation. The assurance of your salvation is wrapped up in the thinking of the Reformation so that we are able to be children of God not because of our guilt but because of our gratitude.

One of the clarion calls of the Reformation was sola scriptura which means in Latin, Scripture alone. That went alongside with sola fede which means by faith alone, and sola grazia which means by grace alone. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone which is attested to in the Scriptures alone. Often people speak of Protestants not as those who protest, but those who are pro-testo, which means for, pro, testo, which means the book or the testament or Scripture. The Reformation was as much about a call back to Scripture, a call to be filled once again with the God breathed Word of God as it was anything else.

As we continue along our time of Prayer, Scripture, and Action we find ourselves in two Scriptures that speak to the power the Word of God. We see a clear act of reformation take place in our Old Testament with Josiah, and Paul reminding Timothy of the power of Scripture and so something that should never be forgotten. The people of God need to take the Word of God seriously, believe that it has authority and trust in that authority as working for our welfare, our good, and not for our harm. Let's read.

READ

When we read in II Kings we come across King Josiah who took the throne when he was 8 years old. The kings of Judah had been corrupt all the way up to then and they were leading the people to worship idols and even encouraged them to perform human sacrifices. God was nowhere in the picture and Scripture was no way around. When Josiah was 27 he commanded an inventory of all of the treasury so that they could see how much money they had. As they were conducting an inventory of the money they had they ran across a book, a scroll, and it happened to be the book of the law, the Torah. No one knew what it was, no one knew it existed so those in charge of the treasury read the book of the law to Josiah, for the first time in his life he heard God's word, and it moved him to mourning, to shred his clothes because he realized that, according to vs.13, that his ancestors had not obeyed this book and so as a result they were not obeying God's word.

Josiah is credited as enacted the largest reforms that Judah had ever seen making Jerusalem once again the center of worship and the temple as God home. He tore down the idols and demanded that the people of Judah become once again the people of God. He was king, he could do that. He realized that a society that forgets Scripture is doomed to forget God. I say that as someone who is optimistic on how God has worked and continues to work through His people. But if His people do not know His Word, then how in the world are they going to do God's work? That was the problem in Josiah's day. That was one of the problems Luther lifted up. The Scripture was relegated only to the priests, no one else was allowed to read it, so no one read it.

I believe that is a big problem in the church today. Not the society, sure, also the society, but it has to begin here in the church. If we do not know Scripture or don't respect it or don't think it is true then we are relegated to make things up as we go along. Christians have done terrible things to themselves and to others because they have strayed from Scripture. It is happening today as well. People are trusting more the words of so called prophets whose emphasis is on the political well-being rather than the words of Scripture whose emphasis is on our relationship with God first and foremost.

Nothing is more inconsistent with the nature of faith than not understanding the authority of Scripture. When we don't embrace the authority of Scripture then this allows us to embrace everything indiscriminately, whatever it may be. When Scripture is forgotten by us then everything sounds good. Every new and interesting way of thinking and being has merit when Scripture is not considered an authority. Scripture is given to us because it is profitable, it allows

us to understand the desires of God in our lives which leads us to live in a way that produces a fruitful and meaningful life in Christ Jesus.

Calvin says that Scripture was not given to us to satisfy our curiosity but rather it leads us to the way of righteousness. After centuries of criticism this one book with the words of God's truth that is for our good, our welfare, and not for our harm, rings true. Once again Calvin: the purpose of Scripture is that each person of God may be complete, fully prepared. We don't read Scripture in order to pile up facts, but to pile up faith.

Josiah understood the importance and the impact of passing down the faith from generation to generation and that passing down manifests itself not singularly, but principally in Scripture. Paul when he is writing to Timothy understood this as well. Let's talk about Timothy. We read about him in Acts 16 and we see that he is the son of a Hebrew mother and a Greek Father. Paul took him under his wing and groomed him to become a pastor which he did, but it wasn't just Paul. We read in chapter 1 that he had a grandmother, Lois and his mother Eunice who had poured their lives into him and their faith into him as well.

Everyone has a grandmother. I've told you a bit about mine. On my dad's side Sadie kept the house in order as a pastor's wife and who then transitioned to a well-known professor. On my mom's side my grandmother was quite the force. She terrified all of us, she had the biggest hands you could imagine. But we knew that she had devoted her life to Jesus on the mission field as she lived her life.

In vs.15 Paul tells him remember how from childhood you have known the sacred writings. This was a distinct advantage that he had over our Josiah who had to discover Scripture on his own. Timothy, remember when you got your 2nd grade Bible and how from then you were steeped in the Word of God. Timothy is like many today where mother and grandmother are the spiritual forces in the family while dad goes along for the ride. Can you imagine how different your family would be if both of you were to raise up your children in the faith?

This gives you time to think about who was influential in your life in shaping your faith so that you find yourself here on this reformation Sunday to remember the importance of Scripture. Paul knew that the future of the church depends on the transmission of the faith. In a few weeks we are going to celebrate the church's 191st birthday and we recognize that we are here today not on our own merit, but there are others who went before us who relied up on Scripture for guidance and direction, which allows us to be here.

So where does Scripture get its authority? If you look at vs.16 we get the answer for that question. Why the Bible and not another book, or something else that we consider as authority? Why doesn't our own experience have as much authority as the Scripture does? Because our experience is fickle and changes depending on our mood and our life circumstances. We read Scripture, on the other hand, is the breathed Word of God which neither changes nor shifts. The Reformation was not to change Scripture, it was to reform the church which had strayed far from Scripture. When we talk about a church that is reformed and is always reforming it is reforming so that it would more closely reflect God's word, because we know ever since Josiah, and even before, the church tends to wander after shiny objects in society and culture and away from the Word of God.

Scriptures are sufficient to provide us with a saving faith in Jesus Christ. The function of Scripture is to elicit a trust in God that leads to forgiveness and personal transformation. No other book ever written can make that claim. As a community and as a church we believe Scripture is inspired by God and so the truths in Scripture, we believe, are true and given to us by God. We aren't making things up as we go along.

If I were to ask you if you are concerned about the direction that society and culture are going I would guess the vast majority of you would say yes, absolutely, yes! The problems we face are not economic, or political, or cultural, or security and safety. The fundamental problem is the anguish and the guilt of an individual facing a righteous God. Too many churches look to have an impact on society by trying to fix these "problems" first without the direction and guidance of Scripture. We do it the other way, we look at Scripture and see what does God tell us we need to spend our time doing. The problem we see in Scripture is the distance that people feel from God and from each other.

Churches have influenced society the most not when we try to force people to do what we want them to do. But when we have acted as the church and actually lived according to Scripture. The church transforms society by preaching the Gospel and it shapes human history. One of the most significant changes the Reformation made in the church was that the sermon, the Word of God preached, became the center of worship. This preaching has to be from God's word and not from the whims or desires of the pastor. Because the Word of God has the authority to transform.

Much of the corrosion of society is present because Christians may not actually believe the words of Scripture. When we say God raised Jesus Christ from the dead we don't mean it metaphorically like something nice to think about and make us feel good. We mean it literally.

Jesus was raised from the dead so that we would be saved from our sins. When Karl Barth was asked if he could summarize his theology in one sentence he said: Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

Brothers and sisters, family, change in our own lives begins by understanding that God is on our side and Scripture attests to this time after time. Whatever the renewal of the church requires, it is being furnished to us by Scripture. Amen.