

Sermon – “One Thing”

Sunday, March 24, 2019

Youth Sunday

Scripture Reading: Psalm 27, Romans 3:21-26, 4:1-3

Jack Zerfas

Emma Batterman

Matthew Knox

Christian Choi

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Springfield, Illinois

### **First Scripture Reading: Psalm 27**

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh—

my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me,

my heart shall not fear;

though war rise up against me,

yet I will be confident.

One thing I asked of the LORD,

that will I seek after:

to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,

to behold the beauty of the LORD,

and to inquire in the Lord’s temple.

For the Lord will hide me in the Lord’s shelter in the day of trouble;

The Lord will conceal me under the cover of the Lord’s tent;

the Lord will set me high on a rock.

Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me,

and I will offer in the Lord’s tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;

I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,

be gracious to me and answer me!

“Come,” my heart says,

“seek Jehovah’s face!”

Your face, LORD, do I seek.

Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,

you who have been my help.

Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

If my father and mother forsake me,  
the LORD will take me up.

Teach me your way, O LORD,  
and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,  
for false witnesses have risen against me,  
and they are breathing out violence.

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

Wait for the LORD;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the LORD!

Amen.

### **Second Scripture Reading: Romans 3:21-26, 4:1-3**

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by God's grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. God did this to show God's righteousness, because in God's divine forbearance God had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that God Godself is righteous and that God justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

### **Jack Zerfas**

In Psalm 27, the once shepherd boy David has found himself in the need of God's mercy and help through battles with his enemies. Rather than to wish for wrong on his enemies David asks for God's guidance and his mercy. This seems to be what really matters to David, the mercy of Jesus Christ. This scripture reading perfectly fits the theme for this year's Youth Sunday which is "The one thing that should really matter to all of us". And this made me think of one of the things that has really mattered to me the past few years. Mission trip every summer with the WPC youth group each summer has truly become a large part of my life and something that I can't wait for each year. The aspects of growing relationships with the youth who have become some of my great friends and also helping others who are less fortunate. Not to mention how my faith has grown over these experiences. Even though it may be just a week out of my year, helping others and making an impact on their lives has brought me closer to god and strengthened my faith because I know that we are doing this work for others in god's name and showing them god's love through our actions. Something that I have noticed during my time volunteering on these mission trips and also on Tuesday afternoons for the Compass for Kids organization is that helping others and benefitting their lives also has a positive impact on myself and makes me feel better. This is an amazing bonus to helping others because I feel like I am receiving something in return. I was excited

when I heard the theme of this year's Youth Sunday being "The One Thing That Really Matters to Us" I knew exactly what I would be talking about this morning and I thought I would be very fitting to talk about something that is very important to me as it is something that this church and youth group have brought into my life. I believe the experiences, relationships, and memories I have made during these mission trips will last me forever and it is sad to think that this summer will be my last. Thank you all for listening to what matters most to me.

**Emma**

**Batterman**

Once when I was in second grade, we were handing out valentine's day cards. It was the ones you buy at the store, so they were all the same, and you were required to hand one out to each person in the class. There was a girl in my class who I didn't particularly like, and who didn't particularly like me, so I wrote in a small "not" in the middle of the card that said "you're special". Thus, the card read "you're not special." Naturally, my parents found out and I was swiftly punished, banned from seeing "The Spiderwick Chronicles" for the rest of my life, a movie I desperately wanted to see. I actually still have not seen it to this day. I cried for hours, even praying for forgiveness from God for this incredibly heinous crime I've committed. What I did was wrong and stupid, but I was in second grade and me and the girl I gave the valentine to laugh about it now. When I read Romans 3:21-26, I was reminded of this story. When the verse claims "for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God", I am again reminded that my sin at the time may seem trivial and humorous now, but when I was 7 it was the easily the worst thing that has ever happened to me, something I'm extremely grateful for being able to say. My sin was forgiven by the girl I wronged, by my parents, by myself, and, most importantly, by God. Yet I was so distraught by the idea that God would never forgive me, that I had ruined my relationship with them. But God forgives even the worst of sins. The thing I did was a sin, and so is greed. So is envy. So is gluttony. Sins, however grave, are all just as easily forgivable as my small act of cruelty toward a fellow 7-year-old. God does not discern how deep the sin was. As long as we have truly repented, we are forgiven. No one can match the glory of God, and no one expects you to. God forgives because God is good. God forgives because God loves us. God does not care about wealth, fame, or status, nor do they care what crime you may of committed against them, God will always forgive us and love us. This is shown through God's act of sending us his only son, so that he can burden our sins. Jesus died so we may be forgiven, so that no matter how egregious our actions, or how cruel our words, God's love will never fail to pardon us.

**Matthew Knox**

Competition is a tricky thing. Plenty of competitors have prepared for years for a competition, yet found themselves falling short in the end. Fans of the St. Louis Cardinals in the early 2000s might remember the story of Rick Ankiel. Ankiel was a twenty-year-old pitching phenom, who quickly made his way into the top of the Major Leagues, striking out batters with his huge fall-off-the-table curveball that confounded even the best hitters. He was on track to become one of the best pitchers the league had ever seen. Then in his first postseason, he faltered. Suddenly, his fall-of-the-table curveball became a fall-off-the-earth pitch. Missing batters left and right, he was quickly benched and soon retired in 2001.

The diagnosis is simple: Ankiel lost his confidence. This single story exemplifies the importance of confidence in competition. Without it, a competitor is diminished. As a competitive swimmer, confidence has played a substantial role in my ability to perform. Towards the beginning of my high school career, I didn't put much faith into the importance of confidence. I believed competition was merely something physical to be performed, and whoever was in the best physical condition would rein victorious. This seems logical, after all. Every day, we see and hear of ways to better ourselves physically: "You'll never believe how much muscle mass Bobby put on after trying this miracle supplement!" But the importance of confidence soon became apparent.

Last April, I traveled to the YMCA National swim meet, my championship meet, in Greensboro, North Carolina. It was my third time competing at this meet, and fifth time attending, due to tagging along for my older sister's competitions as well. Throughout the season, I had been training as I always had, nothing more, nothing less. Coming to the meet, I was roughly in the same physical condition as I had been the year before. Logically speaking, I should have performed about as well as I had the previous year. But I did not. In my failure to increase my training regimen, I had not created an atmosphere for my confidence to grow and expand. Because of this I was not able to perform to the best of my abilities. A predicament appeared: same physical condition, less performing ability. "Where is the difference?" I asked myself. Confidence. Without confidence, just like Rick Ankiel, I was unable to perform to the best of my abilities.

Faith, too, is heavily affected by confidence. This is also abundantly clear: without confidence in one's beliefs, *there is no faith*. Think about it: is there anything else in your life that you dearly believe in, yet have never laid eyes upon? Here it becomes obvious that confidence is even more important in faith than in competition; in competition, confidence is only one factor for success, in faith, confidence is *the only* factor! How do we gain confidence in our faith? As in sports, we practice our faith. By gathering for worship on Sunday and participating in mission trips and youth group activities, we strengthen our faith. Just as a competitor gains confidence by working diligently at their task, we Christians gain confidence in the Lord by working diligently to show others the love of God. "I remain confident of this;" David proclaims. "I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Indeed we will; for seeing and doing the goodness of the Lord is one and the same.

But what about, you may ask, what about those who lose their confidence, whether in competition or faith? Can it be recovered? Absolutely, David tells us. "Be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." *Be strong and take heart*. I have had to apply this message to my own life. To regain confidence in my swimming abilities, I had to once again foster an atmosphere for it to grow, by training harder, faster, and longer. And it has succeeded! Last weekend, I had one of the best competitions in my career, and in two weeks, I will return to the National swim meet with confidence, that anything is possible. But don't just take it from me. Those following Rick Ankiel's story know of the amazing comeback that he displayed: In 2006, five years after retiring, he decided to remake himself from a pitcher to an outfielder. He worked his way through the minor leagues, and in 2007, made it back into the Major Leagues, becoming a starter for the Cardinals. Ankiel went on to play for seven more years.

Whether it is in competition or faith, confidence clearly plays a major role. May we all have the confidence to excel both in our lives and our faith. For when we have confidence, whom shall we fear? Amen.

**Rev. Christian K. Choi**

**One thing:**

It is not fair that each of the youth gets to express how much God means to them and summarize it in less than 400 words. It is even harder to do that in a context of two Scriptures that are being focused today. Please stop any of these youth from simply pass you by when you see them in the hallways or in the west narthex and speak with them about how their week went and where they saw God in their lives. You will be amazed at how much they are in awe of God in their lives.

Today, I want to remind all of us that it is the unfair, yet just God that we worship. If God was fair, could you imagine where would we all be right now? I can speak for myself, that since these youth's age, I have done so many wrong things, committed so many sins against the Lord – as Emma highlighted in her sermon today. All though I may be standing before you as a reverend leading God's flock, but there were times when I did not have the confidence to boast in the Lord, as Matthew pointed out. I have felt the tug in my heart and the grace that were poured over me through many godly men and women in my life as Jack shared, but unlike him, I have not appreciated it or wanted to pay it forward.

We serve an unfair God, for God takes us and makes us just. It does not matter where we have been, what we have done, God simply loves us for who we are, as God's own.

Today's passage from psalm 27, reflects the struggles of David just as we are. After all the wrong he has committed in his past, David testifies that there is one thing that he is asking from the Lord, one thing that he is seeking: that he may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life – to be in the presence of God to praise and worship the King day and night. As we look at the Romans chapters 3 and 4, it reflects the story of Abraham, retelling the story of how broken Abraham was. But the Bible tells us that God will take our faith and receive it as righteousness. If we truly believe that if Jesus Christ died on the cross on our behalf, taking our sins and taking our own cross, and to confess that Jesus is our Messiah and Savior, then he will take our faith and consider that is our righteousness. Friends, after all the things that we possess and we wash them away, and if there is only one thing remains in our lives, would it be Jesus? Would it be faith? Would it be the love of God which surrounds us, encompasses us every moment of our lives?

One of the things that we are so fortunate to have, and which I have the privilege of being in their presences every week, is the youth of Westminster. They will tell you that they have it, that they have the love of Jesus, the love that is shared for each and every one of us in this room. We have the next generation of the torch bearers who will go to the ends of the earth to say and to proclaim that there is no difference between their personal and spiritual lives. We are seeing it right before us. We have hope in Christ's love because of what we see in each of the youth that is present before us.

Friends, may we be as audacious and hopeful as these youth. May we single out what is most important in our heart, especially during this season of Lent. May we remember that Christ, no matter what we do - loves us, cares for us, and will go to the ends of the earth to be with us. Amen.