**Youth Sunday Reflections**

**February 25th, 2018**

**Psalm 22:1-23 and Romans 4:13-25**

**Ethan Bagwell**

**Psalm 22:1-23**

“To be or not to be that is the question, whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles” blah blah blah. Either you know the world famous shakespeare soliloquy introduction or you’ll memorize it senior year. I’ll focus on that part for now, seeing as I only have three minutes. That first question, used over hundreds of years, is so well known because it is a very general statement. You can put anything with it.

To be at church or not to be at church? Will going tonight even help later in life? Will these friendships I’ve made over eighteen years here at belmont last longer than graduation? That is shakespeare's message. It’s a reminder that we do not know what’s going to happen. All we can do is hope. Hope is always a part of our lives, I realize. I don’t know as of right now if I’ll have a good job after college, I don’t even know how well i can do in college. And if it was not to be? Then hamlets line of “to die to sleep, no more” would fit my life. No more doesn’t necessarily mean death, to me it means that you would cut the risks and the fun out of your life, possibly because the random negativity of life caves in on you at times.

Psalm 22-1, “My god, my god, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?” instantly hit me as a compliment to the negative side of the speech. David calls out to god, asking where he is in this time of trouble for him. Everyone has probably felt or will feel that way in their life at some point, feeling as if the world is just out to get you, but what can we do?

           When I was in eighth grade, we played dodgeball at youth one night. Those randomized teams seemed awfully improbable. We got a slew of the younger kids, and the other team was loaded with seniors and juniors. We played for a while and it came down to just me versus three of the older guys. I didn’t want to let my team down, I wanted to be the big hero for our squad, which meant catching a ball to let one of our best players back in. It felt like all the odds were against me. And I could not have been more right. In one wave of throws they tagged this scrawny kid, because I jumped instead of just moving away. Everyone was depending on me in that moment, and I failed them. I vowed to never play dodgeball again. Of course, teenage drama blew that vow out of proportion but you get the point.

While it is not a life changing crisis, the message is still the same for any sadness in one's life. I kept going, and I will keep going, until either I say no more or until the world knows my name. I will find my outrageous fortune, whether good or bad, and if I am ever angry with god for not hearing my woes, I will simply have to take up arms against my sea of troubles, and I will always choose to be.

**Mikayla Jackson**

**Psalm 22:1-23**

Throughout my walk with god I have definitely doubted my relationship with him. Everyone has questions like why has this happened to me/ when will this change. When our questions don't get answered in the way that we want them to be or in the time that we need them there is doubt. In psalm 22 David has doubt toward God. He cries "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?

*Why are You so* far from helping Me,

*And from* the words of My groaning?

O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear;

And in the night season, and am not silent.."We may easily imagine a situation in the life of  David where he experienced this. Many times he found himself in seemingly impossible circumstances and wondered why God did not rescue him immediately.

The Forsaken One argued on good, logical grounds. He reminded God of the care given since birth, and the prior grace that is helping him through the suffering of his present crisis. It's easy for me to relate to what David is saying because there have been times where I have felt the same way. I remember when I first came here in 8th grade and was so nervous, but quickly overcame that fear of being alone when I was able to reconnect with my friends from elementary school. I practically spend my entire day at church on Sunday'sfrom the early morning practices with Gayle to the late night talks at Yourh with Darren. Every relationship has hard times and doubts, but the important part is that you work through them and that's what Belmont has helped me do. Making friends and memories and learning about yourself while growing stronger in your relationship with God even in times when it seems difficult.

**Madison Henry**

**Sermon Psalm 22:1-23**

Hello Church, for those of you who don’t know me, my name is Madison Henry. You may know me through Allison Henry, because I look exactly like her, and Ned Henry, whom which I play music with sometimes. Allison and Ned have greatly impacted many aspects of my life, by being my parents. Ever since I can remember, Mom and Dad have raised me into a house of love and support. I was taught to love everybody, be kind, and the value of learning to play an instrument. My dad still tells me everyday before I leave for school “be sweet to everyone you meet.” And it is a phrase I will never ever doubt. Throughout these teenage years of my life, I have been dealing with Doubt. I think that’s why the beginning of the Psalm resonated with me so much because it seems like whoever wrote it was dealing with doubt. We all experience some doubt in our lives: whether that involves feeling doubtful about eating that last slice of chocolate cake or doubting the topics of college essays or even doubting your decision in giving a 2 minute talk in front of the whole church, etc. Over the last 18 years of my life there have been times where I’ve experienced doubt. I felt doubts the first time I ever got a solo in choir, I felt doubts the first time I shot the basketball towards the net in a church ball game, I’ve even felt doubts in my faith. Recently, I saw a play called Doubt at a local theater called Studio Tenn. This story was about a nun accusing a priest of a scandal. Throughout the whole show your brain goes back and forth from both sides, trying to figure out if the priest was innocent or guilty. The nun finally gets the priest feeling like he had to leave the school due to his actions that may or may not have occured. This of course led the audience to believe he was guilty, until the very last line of the show when the nun, who was accusing the priest, shouts “I have doubts.” My first reaction to this line was that she was referring to the scandal, but as I thought about it more: I realized she was referring to her faith. Her methods of getting information out of the priest caused her to question her relationship with god. This caused me to think about the prevalence of doubts in our lives. I realized that doubts are a normal thing and while it is important to identify those doubts at times, it is also good to focus on the certainties  in my relationship with god: and that involves love and support. I am certain of the love I *feel for the family* I have created at Belmont UMC. I am certain of the support I’ve *felt from the family* I’ve created at Belmont UMC over the past 18 years. And I know that this love and support came from a god that brought us all together to create such a wonderful community. Just like my parents taught me and  just like the church taught me: that we are all children of god that radiate his everlasting love and support among each other.  I also challenge you to be sweet to everyone you meet and spread the love and support you have to everyone you know

**Isabelle Kohler**

**Sermon Psalm 22:1-23**

Everyone has those days; you know the ones. They drag on forever and everything seems to keep piling onto your shoulders making you feel like Atlas, struggling to hold up the Earth. Sometimes these days turn into weeks and maybe even months if you’re unlucky enough. Maybe your car got totaled…twice. Maybe you had the flu and were out of school for a week. Maybe no matter how hard you studied you still somehow managed to fail that test. Or maybe, somehow, by some stroke of bad luck they all happened, in the same month.

Prayers don’t seem to help, which might just be the worst part. Isn’t God supposed to guide his sheep from trouble and protect them? Why does it feel like he’s abandoned me in my greatest time of need?

All valid feelings, but God isn’t some handy man with all the tools and time to repair every problem his sheep come to him with. Sure, it may feel unbearable, making you cry out psalm 22:2 “Oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by nights, but find no rest”.

Maybe God does answer your prayers, maybe not. One response versus another doesn’t make you more or less a child of God. I would even go as far to say that sometimes when it feels like you have been forsaken and that everything is wrong God is right there with you and working to make things better. Probably not in the ways you would pick or expect, but with you and working to make things better nonetheless.

It might be tough right now but stick it out, you never know what sunshine is on the other side of this storm cloud. The rain may not last as long as you think it will. And hey, maybe the rain isn’t as bad as you’ve made it out the be this whole time. Plus, don’t forget rain is an integral part of the growth and flourishing of new life.

When God doesn’t answer your prayers, it shows his faith in you, his confidence that you will become stronger, more prepared, or more resilient from the experience. There’s a Garth Brooks song that says “some of God’s greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.” I find comfort in that idea because when everything in life seems to be going wrong and, like the Psalmist, I feel like God just isn’t listening, I can still hold onto hope that God is with me and working and that maybe my faith will grow and I’ll become stronger, more prepared, and more resilient through it all.

**Daniel Stephens**

**Sermon Psalm 22:1-23**

 Good morning. My name is Daniel Stephens, I am a senior at University School of Nashville, and I have been going to Belmont since I was in Kindergarten. Ever since my first Sunday here, this church has been a huge part of my life. For as long as I can remember, my weeks have been filled with church services, Sunday school, choir practices, Wednesday night dinners, mission trips, and church basketball games. Besides school and my house, I have spent more of my time here than anywhere else.

 When I was reading over the verses we are focusing on today, one passage from the Psalm immediately stood out to me. Psalm 22 verse 22 reads: I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; I will praise you in the very center of the congregation! God has made such an impact on my life through this congregation. Belmont is a community of love and generosity, support and acceptance, teaching and learning. It would take a lot longer than the three minutes I’ve been given for this sermon to thank all of the people here who have made a positive impact on my life, but I would like to give special thanks to Ms. Gayle, to Darren, to all of my Sunday school teachers, to everyone who volunteers for youth events, and to my mom for teaching me so much and taking your time to do so much for me, for this youth group, and for this church.

Belmont is an amazing community. I have met my closest friends here and many of my best memories are from all church retreats, youth mission trips, and choir tours. It’s strange to think that soon I’ll be off at college and won’t be here every Wednesday night and Sunday morning, but wherever I end up I will always carry with me the things that this church has taught me and the memories I have of this community. Luckily, I won’t really have to leave. Belmont is not a building, it is a congregation. Belmont is a congregation whose love and impact reaches far beyond the corner of 21st and Acklen avenue. The love of God shown by this community has affected my life so much, and I know it has affected countless others in the same way. In the troubling times that we live in, may Belmont continue to be a congregation of friendship, acceptance, peace, and love. Amen.

**Kaitlyn Nichols
Psalm 22:23-31**

I started off at Belmont weekday school when I was around 2 years old, and since then I have created friendships with people here that I will never forget, especially since after I graduated preschool I didn’t go back to the church until I was in 5th grade. I was apprehensive to go back to the church, because I knew that people I had gone to preschool with would be there, but would they still like me? Would they be inclusive? Would I fit in? My fears soon turned to excitement as Madison and Isabelle and Allie all seemed enthusiastic to see me. I was excited to see them too, and I was and still am so grateful that we had the common connection of God to bring us together again.

Psalm 22 verse 27 says “all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.” that’s exactly what we do; our community has all kinds of people in it and it is so beautiful and the connection we all make through god is an incredible one. Coming to church and knowing I have at least one thing in common with everyone in this room is a very settling feeling that I can’t feel anywhere else. Belmont is a real home and I am grateful to be a part of it. We all take breaks from our busy weeks to come and celebrate the lord and everyone voluntarily comes here to create a community. I love my youth family and I trust that even if we spend years apart we will always be able to have laughs and good long talks with each other because no matter our backgrounds or how tough our weeks were we always drop it when we come to church and share in agape love.

**Lauren Cato**

**Sermon Psalm 22:1-23**

Good Morning! My name is Lauren Cato and I have been a part of this church my whole life as some of you may know. From church ball to handbells you can see me here almost every Sunday doing something. I live with my mom, dad, twin brother, and what I like to call the zoo, which consists of 4 crazy dogs and 2 cats. Every day is an adventure in the Cato household, but some more than others. I have good days and I have bad days like most people. When those bad days at school strike, I look to my family, my friends, and my community here at church to help guide me through hard times.

The verse that stuck out to me in the Psalm was “my strength is dried up” simply because two things came to my mind when I heard the verse: High School is exhausting and I can only imagine what next year will be like. I have good days and I have bad days like most people, but when those bad days at school strike and my strength feels dried up, I look to my family, my friends, and my community here at church to help guide me through those hard times. This has always seemed normal and natural to me, but the other day in my theology class at Father Ryan High School I realized just how special my family, friends, and community here at church are.

We were having a discussion about encounters with God and how each person has a very distinct and different relationship with God. Some of the people in my class struggle with the fact that they have not clearly heard or seen God in physical things, but other people seem like they have. I do not struggle with this as much because I have found my main source of faith in God through my family, friends, and community here at church. Growing up at Belmont finding God in other people has not been hard, I realized that I just have to look to see the amazing things that people are capable of. I see incredible acts of kindness and faith in the church like room in the inn, Appalachia Service Project, and Heifer, but those only touch the surface. Through our outreach, we help so many people that are struggling and I have learned so much about community and kindness at Belmont.

         On a more personal level, in those moments when life gets really hard and I feel overwhelmed I have found God in showing up to choir knowing my friends will be there to greet me with a smile and a hug, or in coming home after a hard day and talking with my mom and cuddling with my dogs.

Freshman year I never thought that I would be standing here today, but with the help of everyone in this room, I am who I am because of you and your guidance. These past 4 years have been a very long journey, but the same three things keep me going every day: family, friends, and church.

**Fletcher Sanderson**

**Romans 4:13-25**

This month, 17 students, high schoolers my age and younger were killed during what they thought was a routine drill. I would like to take a moment of silence in honor of them. [*Pause for roughly 10 seconds*] Good morning, my name is Fletcher Sanderson. The, OTHER, verse being discussed today is from Romans. It explains that Abraham succeeded not because he followed the law of man, but because he followed the law of God. Nowadays, this is not exactly a feasible life plan for people trying to stay out of prison. The law of man and the law of God have rarely agreed, especially in America. Now, this is often a good thing, as laws of man protect our physical self, whereas the laws of God protect our metaphysical. For example, we're not all being stoned right now for wearing mixed fabrics. Even rarer, however, is when the laws of God and man come into direct conflict, and this is where the real problem arises. At that point, we are each one of us forced to make a choice. In the 1960s, when federal and state laws stated that not all of God’s children were, in fact, his children, Belmont stood as a beacon of light, living out God’s message of equality for all. Now, Belmont continues to do that over and over again. When Pam Hawkins defied the greater Methodist Church for what she believed in, we followed God’s call and stood behind her. Choices. God is always calling us to make a choice. In these last few weeks, America has seen an unprecedented awakening of young people. They are choosing to not allow the nation to sit idly by as students are attacked in the place where they are supposed to feel safe. Belmont must in turn choose to listen to them. Belmont has already taught its young people how to follow the Law of God, leading by example, but we must then give them a voice. We cannot make a true choice uninformed, thus we cannot determine whether the law of God trumps the law of man in any given situation without considering every possible opinion, one of the most important of those being our young people. While this may seem like shameless self-promotion, I assure you that it is entirely true what they say: young people are our future. We can either listen to them or stay stuck in the past.

**Allie Rutland**

**Sermon Psalm 22:1-23**

Good morning everyone my name is Allie Rutland, and I will be speaking about the Psalms passage- a psalm of David

 David laments to God directly following the collapse of his sin with Bathsheba. David has every intention of living righteously, but we all know what happened with Bathsheba (lust and murder to name just a few transgressions).  David is not alone under the weight of his own circumstance and is not alone in the acceptance of the redeemable grace of God.

 Belmont has taught me the truth behind the word grace. I have met grace in the kind eyes of an usher after an especially long week. I have encountered grace in the warmth of our youth group in the midst of tragedies. Grace has been embodied by my sunday school teachers, my Faith Friend Mary Kay Jordan, my Prayer Friend Betty Jane Taylor, Darren, Gayle, and the youth sitting behind me. It’s through Belmont, that I am able to confidently define grace.

 Grace is an unconditional outpouring of love and kindness. David experiences God’s immeasurable grace through his life-altering experience with Bathsheba; likewise, I have experienced God’s grace through my relationships and community here at Belmont. David’s experience with grace was like a passionate all-encompassing forest fire. My own interactions with grace have been more of a slow burn. While mine are less episodic- both leave a tangible mark.

 As my life began altering and what felt like in the moment falling apart, I was able to lean on Belmont. Middle School hits like a punch to the gut for everyone, but the pangs of growing pains left me with weeks where it felt like I lived solely for the open doors of Belmont. In times where my skin felt like a cage, Belmont gave me the freedom to be myself. When it was difficult for me to love myself, Belmont made me feel loved. Regardless of the insecurities that were tearing on my pride, within these walls I would be able to square my shoulders and walk with confidence.

 Through Belmont, I have been the most rich receiver of grace. You have given me grace in years of devoted listening to my singing in choirs. You have supported trips that have changed the way I view the world. You have listened to me. You have respected me. You have given me relationships, teachers, and mentors. But most of all, Belmont, you have given me a space in which I feel comfortable to fail and supported to thrive.