October 13th , 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Ordinary Time

10:30 am

You Are the Result of the Love of Thousands

I. CREDO

I wasn’t too sure when I showed up last week at Mo-Ranch. Mo-Ranch is a Presbyterian retreat center in a very isolated part of Texas, about two hours outside of San Antonio. I went for a conference called CREDO, where twenty-five or so of newly ordained clergy gathered together to have a holistic conference about our well-being, from finances, to physical health, to emotional well-being, to vocation and leadership. By no means was it a ‘light’ week, it was heavy with thought and emotion, and by the end of the week, I was amazed by the bonds that had been created through the process.

One of the most beneficial parts of our time together was with a small group. Now, as a strong introvert, I am one who dislikes group projects and small cohorts by nature. Yet, I gathered with three incredible women and right from the start we created a bond that I sense will remain with me for the rest of my life. One of the women, Sarah, is a seventh-generation Presbyterian minister. That’s right, seventh-generation. It was a love of generations of this Presbyterian faith that brought her from college to seminary and into the parish. I don’t think she really wanted to join the ‘family business’ of Presbyterian ministry, but the generations before her were such strong pillars of faith that the Spirit moved her into this vocation.

Yet, as we all shared our stories, not only in the small group, but in the larger group as well, it was clear that we did not get to this conference on our own. It was our grandparents, a mentor, the family of faith, that brought us into this vocation. It was the love of people who nurtured us, loved us, and encouraged us that made us all heed a call to ministry. We could take credit for passing our ordination exams, studying Hebrew and Greek for hours on end, but the real reason that I or my colleagues stand in the pulpit this morning is not out of academic privilege alone, it is because we were loved first and encouraged to face the calling, no matter what obstacles or challenges would lie before us.

II. All Saints Day

When we celebrate All Saints Day, we think about the people who have come before us, people from the greatest generation and beyond, people who have inspired us in some way. And there’s no limit on who we claim the carnation for – for today I not only remember those saints I’ve met in person, but those saints throughout the ages that through their writing, their art, and their witness. I think about not only my grandparents, or my niece, I think about writers like Rachel Held Evans or photographer Ansel Adams, who ultimately shifted the way in which I perceive the world.

Today, I long for you to remember those people, whether you have met them in person or whether it is someone who was your mother, sister, brother, aunt, etc. I want you to consider the gift of God in these people and the ways in which God’s Spirit worked in and through them to gift you with a better understanding of the world around you.

III. A Bridegroom

Today, we also face the uncomfortable reality that it will one day we will not be the ones coming up here and moving a flower from vase to vase. I’m not trying to bum you out, but we are mortal, we will die, and my hope and prayer is that when that time comes, that I would be a saint. And what I mean by that is, I hope at the end of my days, I can say that I lived well, that I inspired others, that I encouraged people, that I made a change and that legacy would stay there far beyond my mortal life. And I don’t wish this for applause or for praise, but I genuinely hope that one day I will be counted among the saints because I followed God, because I heeded the call, and that God would look upon me and say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

A favourite saint of mine is the recent loss of a fantastic poet, Mary Oliver. She wrote a poem called, “When Death Comes”, which I would like to share with you now:

When death comes like the hungry bear in autumn; when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse to buy me, and snaps the purse shut; when death comes like the measle-pox when death comes like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,  
  
I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering: what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness? And therefore I look upon everything as a brotherhood and a sisterhood, and I look upon time as no more than an idea, and I consider eternity as another possibility, and I think of each life as a flower, as common as a field daisy, and as singular, and each name a comfortable music in the mouth, tending, as all music does, toward silence, and each body a lion of courage, and something precious to the earth.  
  
When it’s over, I want to say all my life I was a bride married to amazement. I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms. When it’s over, I don’t want to wonder if I have made of my life something particular, and real. I don’t want to find myself sighing and frightened, or full of argument. I don’t want to end up simply having visited this world.

That poem gets me every time, because it truly expresses what I believe we are called to be in this world, as saints who still have the ability to have some life left in our bones. May we approach God’s world with that sense of wonder, and awe, and blessedness, that we can say at the end of our days: we were married to amazement.

IV. For the Love of Thousands

As we celebrate this All Saints Day, I remind you that you are made of love, you are created by people who have encouraged you and delighted in you and have made you consider the impossible. This celebration is also a call, to continue that legacy, to be the next generation where we are the encouragers, influencers, and love-giving people.

I leave you with this thought, but by another writer, a Native American writer named Linda Hogan, who offers us this visual, “Walking. I am listening to a deeper way. Suddenly all my ancestors are behind me. Be still, they say. Watch and listen. You are the result of the love of thousands.”