October 28th – 10:30am

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Alpha and Omega

1. The Alpha and Omega

In our reading today from the book of Revelations, the last few

verse offers us those familiar words, “I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.” Recently, I had the opportunity to experience that feeling enmeshed in those words.

 It was a Friday. I had the opportunity to go and have my first visit with Harrison, Brittany and Danny’s new baby. It was a wonderful visit. I held him, looking into those eyes, completely awestruck. When I left the visit, I reflected on how grateful I was that Harrison had come into our lives. I reflected, I thought – this is the very beginning for Harrison. Who will Harrison become? Will he love baseball and be a coach like his dad? Will he enjoy teaching like his mom? Will he be completely different from either and love something else? Imagine all the adventures that he will get to tap into. Who will Harrison become? What an exciting and amazing place to be – at the very beginning, where all the doors are wide open and the world is his. He isn’t wrapped up like the adults in paying taxes, or thinking about political matters, or facing major life questions. He is new, he is at the beginning, and Harrison simply gets to be – and what a gift that is to be part of that journey. What a gift it will be to see him from the beginning and watch him grow and learn and be amazed at new and marvellous things.

 And shortly after visiting Harrison that day, I travelled out to Northwest to see our brother and friend, Dr. Elwood. I sat down next to him, and while he was confused, we were still able to hold snippets of conversation. I thought about how much I loved this man – not because of his accolades (which, by the way, are far and wide and incredible), but simply because of his spirit. I thought about all he did in his life, I thought about how faithful he had been to the church and to Springfield. I considered how he, despite being in pain, would still smile that bright smile, and continue to be optimistic. At the end of life, there was Dr. Elwood, still teaching me, still teaching us, what it means to live a good life, a holy life, and what it meant to depart this life well.

 I remember, as I exited the elevator at Northwest hospital, I saw the chapel sign, and I walked in. I sat, I looked at the stained glass window, and I was struck with nothing to say. All I could offer, in such a holy day, was gratitude to God for calling me to a vocation in which I get to marvel at the beginning and the end, to walk with people in the journey, and to enter spaces that most people do not have the opportunity to see.

1. In the End is a Beginning, and in the Beginning, the end.

What might have been so powerful about both visits in one

day was that in both families it marked a transition. Brittany and Danny were no longer on their own, they are now mom and dad. They won’t be able to sleep well for another eighteen years, a date night will be hard to plan, and all of their priorities and love are retuned and refocused. And this is a wonderful, beautiful thing – but a transition all the same. In an end of a phase, a new beginning started with Harrison.

 In Dr. Elwood’s journey, there was a signalling of the end, the end of this mortal and human life, but a peace that resounded in knowing that he would no longer be in pain or suffering, and that he would get to join the saints triumphant. For those left behind, we have a sadness, but Dr. Elwood, will no longer be hampered by the things of life that cause mourning and crying and pain, and that gives us hope. In his end, there is a new beginning.

1. Calling on the Text

I have to say, it’s disputed amongst pastors – some people love Revelation, some people try to avoid it, because honestly, at moments, it get a little apocalyptically weird. I sit in the second camp. Yet, this is a part of the book where I find hope and moving images during troubled times. I love the idea of a new heaven and a new earth, where everything is set right – where corruption no longer dwells, where animosity ends, and God lives among us in a tangible way. And what great hope there is to hear that the ways of this life, of death, of mourning, of crying, and of pain, will be no more. Who wouldn’t be encouraged by that idea? And everything is made new – a revived hope, a new way of doing and being, a new way of living this life together.

 But profoundly for me, and the focus of this week’s sermon, is this idea of God being the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I love to think that God is with us right at the beginning – not only the beginning of time and creation, but the beginning of our lives, as we take our first breath – God is there and God is creating something new within us. At the end of our days, God is there, watching and waiting for his saints to enter the Kingdom. God is with us, every breath, every moment, from the beginning, to the in-between life of child, youth, adult, elder, and with us always. For a book that is so often wrought with tough images, what a beautiful and comforting sense that this can bring to the faithful.

1. All Saints Day

Today, we celebrate All Saints Day, and this text in particular

is chosen for this morning. In our reformed tradition as Presbyterians, we define a saint differently than our Catholic brothers and sisters. There is no special amount of God points we need to accumulate, but simply because we are, simply because God has created us for good, we are all saints. You can define the word ‘saint’ in many different ways, but when it comes down to it, the origin points to ‘holy’ – a holy person, a person of virtue, a person who is trying their best to be Christ like. Simply by showing up here this morning, you are counted amongst the saints.

 And today, we get to honor those saints that have gone before us. In doing so, we recognize that God, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, journeyed with them in this life and we give thanks to God for God’s abiding presence. We also give thanks for their faithfulness in seeking out what it meant for them to use their God given gifts and abilities and using them here on Earth to create a better and more holy space – whether that was in their home, their church, their community, or further afield.

 But let it be said, that in commemorating, we are not worshipping those who have gone before us. Yet, we are giving thanks to God for their life, for how they have influenced us, and recognize that God was an integral part of their life here on earth. We give thanks for all that they have taught us on what it means to be faithful stewards and faithful people.

 As we place the carnations in the vase, please feel free to say the name of the person you are thinking of or think of them in your mind. Remember, with hope, with joy, with thanksgiving, that while we no longer get to experience life with these saints, they are free and live with God, as we will someday. In placing that carnation, remember that God is with you, from the beginning to the end – of this life, of every transition, of every breath you take. As you place a carnation, may you be comforted by the peace of God, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. **Amen.**