**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**September 11th, 2022**

**A New Birth Certificate**

1. Who am I?

Tomorrow, Bryan and I will celebrate one year of marriage.

There is tradition that could trace back to the ancient Romans, or medieval Germans, to the Victorian era – we just don’t know – but of using certain materials for the anniversary gift for each year. The first year is seemingly simple, it is the gift of paper.

 The gift of paper I will bestow upon my husband is from the Social Security office. No, it doesn’t sound romantic, I know – but it will be my new, legal name – Rebecca Marie Price. There are many reasons it took so long to change my name, all pretty boring reasons, but it feels like a perfect paper gift to give him this year. In the Genesis text, it feels appropriate, like through some piece of paper we are able to unite as a family in a new and different way.

 As I’ve been preparing for this name change, I had to dig around the house for my birth certificate. Have you ever looked at yours or your children’s and just marveled at it? It tells me my name, my place of birth, my parent’s names, my time of birth, and so on this muted pink carbon copy paper. The paper names who I am, it names who I belong to, it tells me where I come from.

 It makes sense to me that some folks who are adopted long to search for this information, even if they have happily grown up in a wonderful adoptive family. I think it’s also why we spend our money on ancestry testing – our pure curiosity about where we come from, where can we call home? There’s something about that birth certificate though. Is it nostalgia? Is it a connection? I’m not sure – but I do know that this piece of paper feels heavier than its own actual weight.

1. Where are you from?

This week, we begin an eight week Sunday series called, “I’ve

been meaning to ask…” and this Sunday’s question is “Where do you come from?” It’s a question we like to ask one another when we first meet each other or again, we are seeking a connection to one another.

 There can be something beautiful within this asking, but it also has its downsides. We need to be brutally honest here – as we claim our own identity, we sometimes do that as a means of disclaiming other people’s identity. You know it, you’ve heard it, perhaps you’ve thought it – “Are you *really* American?” If you do not look a certain way, let’s say…white and English speaking, are you really one of us? These questions around identity and belonging can create beautiful connections but they can cause, and have caused, terrible disruptions within our human family.

 Yet we hear it in our Scriptures, in so many places, that who we are, and the diversity of gifts and attributes we hold are a gift from God and a gift to the church. For example, if you want someone to talk about Jesus or art, I’m your girl. If you want financial or mathematical wisdom, I’m not your girl. As humanity, we were never meant to hold all the gifts of this world and as part of community, we are called to share those gifts that have been bestowed upon us and share them with others.

 Diversity of mind, gender, race, and so on is what creates the beautiful landscape that makes us better than the sum of our parts. We remember the diversity found within the living God of Jesus Christ, who was Jewish and middle-eastern, who didn’t look like many of us but who we continue to call Savior and God.

1. Beyond Diversity

I name all of this because I want to make sure to

overemphasize the point that diversity is crucial as we come to this Genesis text. We see God creating the world and we see Adam who is need of something else.

 Look around Adam though – he’s got these beautiful rivers flowing, an abundance of animals, and this landscape that is seemingly gorgeous. What else could Adam need?

 I have to include a fun and nerdy fact here, but A’dam, in Hebrew, actually doesn’t hold a gender. A’dam is a neuter noun that means something close to ‘earthling’ in the English language. Since Adam is a male’s name in our world, we’ve always just assumed that Adam is male. This is my little act of toppling the patriarchy, but after finding this out, it’s always felt important to me. It wasn’t that Adam needed a woman, it’s that Adam needed a partner in this world who could have conversation and share time within community. We later get to the sense of man and woman cleaving to one another, but it first must be said – this wasn’t the Hebrew understanding.

 But past that interesting nerdy fact, yes – yes, in fact, Adam needed someone else and so came Eve. And then came more humans, and community grew ‘till the ends of the earth.

1. Birth Certificate

So, I think about that birth certificate that I first thought of

earlier in the sermon. While it’s important that you know that I was born in New Jersey and made from sand and saltwater and pizza and bagels – it’s more important that you know that I’m a child of God. As I think about you, it’s important for me to know where you come from, your experiences, and perhaps your great love of the Maryland flag that can be put on any apparel item, so it seems – but again, the most important thing that I know and that you know – is that you are a child of God.

 What if we were reissued another birth certificate in light of the fact that we all come from this one place, even if it’s more of a narrative, long long ago? Place of birth: Eden. Parents: The Trinity. Name: Beloved Child of God.

 It begs the question, “Can we sit in the tension of being the same and different – can we both celebrate diversity and at the same time, look around and acknowledge that we were all created by God?” It’s a yes and no in the same breath.

 You can hear it in my voice, you can hear it in this sermon – the tension is there. The tension has been there from the beginning of time and it might just be here until the end of time. Yet, I believe there’s some ways we can live into the tension, without some formula, but a mindset that gets us closer to who we are looking to be as beloved children of God. And let me say, out of the gate – you are human, I am human – we will sometimes fail and we will not always hold the tension perfectly, but it doesn’t stop the fact that we are called to continue to try to balance it.

 When I meet someone new, I try to remember before a word even comes out of my mouth, that this individual is a child of God. I also acknowledge that this person has experiences and relationships that have been formational, and I may agree with them and I may not and it doesn’t change their status as ‘child of God.’ So there’s a mindset to carry with you, but I would also encourage you to seek to be curious in an authentic and non-judgmental ways. When you ask, “Where are you from?” may we try to push any lingering stereotypes away and step into the unknown, curious to know one of God’s very own. May we seek to be people who generously hold the tension, build community the way Christ shows us, and live into our own belovedness each and every day. Amen.