January 27th – 10:30am

Springfield Presbyterian Church

To Plant and Build Up

I. Holy Cow! Assessment

Throughout the months of November and December in 2018, we had the opportunity to share our voice to share our thoughts on our church through the Holy Cow! Assessment. Let me take this opportunity to thank each of you who participated and those who offered helpful feedback and insight into the assessment process. On January 7th, a small group gathered after church at the manse to hear the results and an ‘interpretation’ of those results from the Holy Cow! Consulting group.

To be completely transparent with you, I wasn’t sure how this was all going to play out. We, used in the universal sense, were weary – we just ran the great race of Advent, where if you blink for a moment, you miss something. We also just rang in the New Year. To say the least, as we gathered together, I wondered what our tired bodies and minds would be able to take in.

I’m happy to say I was wrong about my initial concerns. As we sat at the table, we were able to look at Springfield and the amazing strides that have taken place over the last few years in real and tangible data. We used to be what was categorized as a ‘reinvention’ or ‘recovery’ church - a status of low energy and low satisfaction. We were more than surviving, but the morale was low. And yet, as we sat there on that Sunday, we had the opportunity to see that Springfield now sits in the ‘high energy, high satisfaction’ quadrant, a place of ‘transformation’ where we are doing exciting things and finding new meaning and purpose.

The quadrant is even the one that says we should be ‘mentors’ to other churches.

Now, I have to admit, I felt quite smug, quite, as the British might say, chuffed, or in other words, swelling with pride. This is our Springfield, and our work, the work of God, the work of leadership and the congregation as a whole has done a lot of hard work to get where we are today. Sure, the sound system and powerpoint screen aren’t exactly as we want it quite yet, but we’ve been brave enough to say that the Spirit is here and it is moving and we are transforming. It’s not just me, it’s not just you, it’s this community that has grown in faith and trust and energy and has said, ‘Springfield has a purpose to serve Christ in this world, and we are putting our hearts into making that a reality.’ I think it is fair to give all of yourselves a pat on the back, a ‘well done’, and a feeling of accomplishment for all that you’ve done in your service to Christ and the church. We do not spend enough time celebrating our successes.

II. Jeremiah’s Call

I’ll let you dwell in that joyful place for a moment or two, as we dive into the world of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah is what some theologians call, ‘the everyman or everywoman prophet’ – because he is so easily relatable in this moment. God has a call for him and he more or less says, “Listen, I’m too young, I’m not the guy you’re looking for, thank you for the offer, but this is just – I’m not ready.” You can also imagine Jeremiah whispering under his breath, ‘Please. Choose. Someone. Else.’ But God does not relent, he tells him that he will put the words that he is suppose to say in his mouth. God is going to equip him for this task, for every task that comes with the call, despite his feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, or any objection that Jeremiah can make to run from the call.

This passage of Scripture is one that we often hear, especially during ordinations or baptisms, or a time of significant change or transformation. It reminds us that just as Jeremiah is called, we are called as well. It reminds us that just as inadequate or anxious as we feel, God continues to equip. It reminds us that we can ‘no’ to the call, but God will continually say ‘yes.’

III. The Priesthood of All Believers

Jeremiah reminds us that every one of us has a call. And I feel like we often sell ourselves far too short in that call. Sure, I went to seminary, I worked hard, this preaching and teaching and being with you in this position – that’s my call. Oh, and you bet, I had moments where I took Greek or Hebrew or faced a tough ministry situation and I looked up and said, ‘You’ve got the wrong girl, here.’ Oh, yes. And yet, I stand here before you today, still called and still being equipped.

Far too often, folks think that people like myself are the ‘called’ ones. Yet, I’m here to pronounce, loud and clear, that you are all called to serve God. Do not sell yourself short. If you want to go and look at the data of the assessment, go look – it is your work, it is your calling, that is building up the church and building up the body of Christ. I could stand here all day and point to each one of you at least one thing you have done that has made this church a transformative church. We would be here until eight pm and then I might also be unemployed at that point.

But honestly, dig deep – whether you think it’s big or small, your call is here and God continues to call you and equip you. Every call matters.

III. To Pluck Up and Build Up

Now, let us return to that assessment scene where I’m quite chuffed. As soon as we celebrated our great strides, we were told to ‘not rest on our laurels.’ In other words, the call isn’t over. In other words, you are doing well, but in order to grow and learn and further become the body of Christ, this doesn’t mean you can hang up your calling on the coat rack and call it a day.

The essence is: you’re doing great, but you can’t stop now. I think that’s encouraging news – it’s a pat on the back as you set off to run another part of the relay race. It’s saying – you’re going in the right direction, keep on going.

IV. The Pluck Up and Build

I think Springfield’s current situation aligns itself pretty well with the last few lines of the text we read from Jeremiah today. We hear that Jeremiah is going to have to do the hard work of plucking up and pulling down – getting rid of the old and tired and non-essential ways of living. And that’s scary, and I do not blame Jeremiah for being anxious – because who wants to walk into a crowd and say, ‘In order for things to improve, we have to change.’

But it’s the truth. It is only in falling that we can rise. It is only in looking at our systems and ideas and thoughtfully discerning, ‘is this working or not working?’ and being honest. It is being daring enough to say, ‘this is the way we’ve always done it’ isn’t a good enough reason to continue to do it.

And then Jeremiah hears that in plucking up, in discovering what doesn’t work and what needs changed that he can do the exciting work of planting and building. And I think that’s also a space we are in right now, where we are not only saying ‘what’s working’ but we also get to say, ‘what if we tried something new? What if we planted something and see if takes root?’ And we are doing that, like I said – in the sound system and the screen, and we will continue to be doing that hard work, of plucking up and planting, changing and growing. We will do that work as a family, a family of called believers who continue to say that Springfield is the body of Christ, alive and awake, serving God in our community and beyond. Amen.