**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**March 13th, 2022**

**The Work-Ethic of Jesus**

**Lent II**

1. Under Threat

As I was reading this passage this past week, my thoughts

of the character, strength, and sheer work ethic of Jesus never ceases to amaze me. He is warned by the Pharisees, by the people in power, to stay away, to stop doing what he is doing, for this man, Herod, wants to kill him. And there is Jesus, you can tell his frustration in the passage but also his unwillingness to budge from the call that has been put upon him. Go tell that fox that I’m going to heal and cure and when I finish my work, I will finish my work. It’s on God’s timeline, not yours.

 I think we all can admire that kind of strength, to face down the evil and control of a ruler and continue to follow the call. As the news reels continue to tell us of the news around the world, and meditating upon this passage, my modern day thoughts went to President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

 He is a young man of 44 years of age, the elected president, and a former comedic actor in his country of birth. When another fox, Putin, said – get out of the way, I’m taking over – Zelenskyy is seemingly unflinching. With threats against him and his family, he was offered by our US President a safe space to flee. Yet Zelenskyy said – no, these are my people, I’m going to be alongside them, I don’t need to flee, but I do need your help. I don’t know if I’d have that level of strength – I’d like to think I would, but you don’t know until you are in the situation. If you were given a ‘get out of war’ free card…who wouldn’t be tempted?

 A few days ago on a broadcast, he shared that the people of Ukraine are a people who believe in freedom and he articulated that Americans are also a people whose heart is set on freedom. He wanted to show that we may seem geographically apart, but in our hearts, we are one humanity.

1. Metaphors

Now, I want to be cautious because I don’t want to mix

metaphors. I can’t put Putin in Herod’s spot or Zelenskyy in Jesus’ place, but it’s a present day representation of that push and pull we see both in our larger world as well as our smaller neighborhoods.

 There are places that we see in our lives where we have that tension, and indeed, it might not be a tension of life or death, but it is one that feels like we are under threat. When we are told by someone in a power position in our lives that we should not do this or that, but we feel the call, we can be risking our jobs, our reputations, our sense of self. We see this in workplaces, where a CEO might care more about money but a worker might care more about people, and that tension of living under that pressure can be brutal and demoralizing. It’s in these moments we can identify the little Herods and little Jesus’ of our world and through Scripture, we see that we are called to continue on in the tension, to seek the best for all people, and to continue to do the good work of Christ.

1. Maternal

Now, I’m going to do a swift turn in another theological direction

because Jesus also uses another metaphor that is very helpful for us as we think about who Jesus is and who we are called to be. He says that he has “desired to gather up his children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.” Jesus has this deep paternal sense, a sense that he wants to protect his children, his very beloved.

 This imagery is especially helpful for people of faith who struggle with having a male God. For those in their lives who have had abusive or poor relationships with males, whether that is a father or other figure, we get to see the empathetic maternal side of Jesus. It’s also clear to me not only here but amongst the Gospels that Jesus wouldn’t buy into what we would see as modern day male toxicity and wounding stereotypes of gender. Jesus as both God and human is able to hold both the facets of male and female norms in a comforting and compelling way that provides a healthy balance for the faithful.

 Now, I have a great dad, granted, he’s probably on this call, but I’m telling you the truth and even if he weren’t on the screen, I can truthfully say that my dad is a great man who goes out of his way to help others and is always a peacemaker. Yet, I’m lucky, I know that – I know many individuals out there who have seen their father as abusive, or even if not abusive, controlling or harmful to their sense of self, especially in those important years of childhood growth. When those individuals hear that God is Father, that can be paralyzing and the questions get harder, ‘If God is like my dad…then how can I believe that God is good and loving and kind?’

 Now, you could counter this statement by saying that not all mothers are good and healthy and God as mother might not be comforting to some. That is absolutely true as well, but God as mother is not often the normative idea in mainstream Protestant America.

 Or you could say that you are unbothered by male or female God and…if that’s the case, then consider yourself blessed, because you have been shown loving-kindness.

 But let’s take ourselves away from the heavy theological tone and offer a pastoral comforting word – if God as Father is hard for you to hear, it makes you antsy, it makes you struggle, I point to this passage as well as a myriad of other passages where God as maternal figure is very much present. If you need to adjust your language, then I encourage you to – if you need to say, Our Creator, rather than Our Father – then do so. The bottom line here is pastoral – let us not let the gendered norms of this world hinder our ability to fully worship God and see God as good, loving, and kind.

1. This Lent

So as you enter this week, I pray that you are awestruck by

Jesus’ strength and feel compelled to live in that strength by doing good works and offering our best, even when that’s hard or confronting forces are working against us. I also pray that you are able to broaden your understanding of God – a God that is beyond our thoughts on gender, and see a God that is good and longs to shelter us in God’s deep and abiding love.
 I offer you a mantra as I close this sermon, one that I will say if I’m facing something that is challenging or I need a pep-talk, and it speaks to the text we have heard today. Repeat after me: “I am in the shelter of God’s love” – may those words offer you comfort and a reminder of God’s presence in moments you need to hear it the most. Amen.