March 10th, 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Second Sunday In Lent

Power Play

1. More Power

Since I live in a British-American or American-British home (it depends on how much tea is had that day) – a common topic that is brought up in our household is Brexit and the unknown effects. Recently, a comic journalist, Samantha Bee, in a segment on TBS broadcasted a clip called, “A Brief History of Brexit for Americans.” The essence of Brexit is that 51% of British folk voted to leave the European Union and 49% wished to remain as part of the EU. With such a close vote, the questions are looming: what happens next, will the next vote later on this month bring Britain any further?

And it is anxiety provoking and stressful, for either side, and within this segment by Samantha Bee, her co-host spoke about the transfer of power in a comical way. The Prime Minister David Cameron wanted more power, so he set the referendum out, not thinking it would win, and it did, and he lost power. And Corbyn and May and other political figures come along, vying for power. As we watch from America, it seems like it’s all a political power play and that at this point, no one really understands what Brexit is all about – but the reality is, however this plays out, it will have consequences that hurt people, for the cost of power.

Now, it would be unfair to point to the UK and say, “Look at them, shame, shame.” I use it alone for a simple reference point to power. We would be lying to ourselves if we didn’t admit that there are power plays everywhere you go – from Capital Hill, to office politics, to church politics, and even family system politics. At Capital Hill, who will be heard and will gain power and prestige? In the office, who will climb to the top of the salary bracket by any means, just to gain more power? In our churches, who will be behind the scenes, sometimes in genuine ways to serve the church, but sometimes to see their way and vision succeed? In our homes, who is the head of the household, who is our protector but also the person who draws the fine line in the sand? Let us not deceive ourselves – you cannot escape it, you may be the powerful one or not, but in most, if not all, arenas of our lives – you’ll find the power play.

II. Jesus and the Pharisees

It would then not surprise you to see that Jesus was in no way exempt from the power play of his culture and day. Jesus is outside Jerusalem doing what he does best – what his life purpose has been thus far – to heal, to cleanse, to drive out demons, to comfort, to encourage. He is out on the streets doing the work that he is called to do. And then the Pharisees, almost give a poke on the shoulder to Jesus, and say, “Excuse me, sir, you will want to go away from here – Herod wants to kill you.”

I can almost imagine Jesus smiling a gentle smile and shaking his head. As if the Pharisees were looking out for Jesus, as if they were giving him a heads up because they wanted to save his life. No, Jesus knows that the Pharisees have ulterior motives – the Pharisees are using Herod as their excuse to shut down Jesus and God’s plan.

And there Jesus replies, seemingly unaffected, but also with a little jab too, “You go tell that fox, Herod, that I’ll be here today, tomorrow and the next day, to do my work.” And that’s that. Jesus knows what is to come, but he also knows what he is called to do in the here and now. Simply by doing the good he is doing, simply by doing the will of God, he is offering an affront to the powers that be.

Jesus knows where he is headed though – he is headed for Jerusalem and he knows what will come. He has heard of the prophets in Jerusalem who have been reviled, ignored, and/or killed. He knows Jeremiah almost did not make it out alive, he knows Uriah who spoke out against the King of the time was killed. He knows he is not welcome there.

And he also knows that he is facing Herod – the same man who executed John the Baptist – he knows that this man is powerful, at least in the eyes of the law. When Jesus could choose fear, instead he chooses service and he chooses to be in the moment. He chooses to do the will of God, today, tomorrow, and the next day – no matter what may come, no matter the forces in power, no matter what. There is no question here for Jesus, there is no stepping down.

The only further response we see from Jesus is that he mourns as a mother mourns for her children. Jesus looks at Jerusalem, the city of David, which could be a place where people thrive and live peacefully, but he knows the power play of Jerusalem. He knows the people on the streets and the pain that lingers under the cover of nightfall. He wishes he could scoop up the children of God and put them under his metaphorical wings and protect them. He knows it will not be the case, but he laments that it cannot be.

III. Lament turn into activism

And we lament too, in our climate. If I could provide housing and healthcare to all, I would – if I could have everyone know, from the depths of their soul, that they are beloved by God, I would – If I could help and cure and solve the injustices that we see daily, I would. I lament. We lament. But that doesn’t mean that one good deed does nothing – for perhaps our lament can turn into action.

Jesus chose to carry on, to say that God was bigger than Herod and that Herod’s power didn’t define him. It turns out those who look like they are in power and control are not as much as they think they are – it turns out that sometimes it’s a show. Jesus chose to serve today, tomorrow, and the next day – he chose in the moment to serve God, no matter what the cost or the choice. His lament turned into action.

The invitation, for us then, is for our lament to turn into action. We do this in all different ways – you can call it acts of social justice or acts of serving God. We may not be able to remediate the world of hunger, but we can give a blessing bag to someone on the street corner. We may not be able to make our schools completely safe, but we can sit with our youth and hear them and encourage them as they grow and learn. We may not be able to bring the justice system into full alignment that reconciles and heals, but we can listen to the incarcerated, we can hear the victims voices, and we can do our part in holding all accountable to a justice that is higher and greater than a power play.

Some well known person said something along the lines of, “All law is legal, yet not all law is ethical.” It is easy to say that the law is right and wrong, but in a world of power plays, we find out that some laws do not serve all people. As servants of Christ, it is our commitment and privilege to create a better, more healthy, more inclusive society that seeks justice and dignity for all people. We may have no power, or we may have much – but let us use the power that we do have for good and in service to Christ.

IV. Dreaming of a New World

As you go out into this world, your pastor is not encouraging you to go and break laws – I do not want to be called up for bail money. But rather, I’m asking you, alike Jesus, to chose love today – to chose to serve God, no matter what, knowing that other powers might be pressing you to do differently. Maybe you do not know where your service lies – pray about it, think about it, and discern it – and in this journey you will find your place of service. May we go out into the world to do good in the face of all powers and serve Christ in all we do. Amen.