**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**October 23rd, 2022**

**Where Do We Go From Here – Week 1**

1. **Introduction**

This week, we are into the seventh week of the series, “I’ve been meaning to ask…” which invites us to live in authentic curiosity with one another. In the first two weeks, we asked, “Where do you come from?” and we’ve been able to assert that we can celebrate both the diversity among us, while also remembering that we are all called beloved by God. In continuing the question, we thought about those spaces where people aren’t often called beloved – the places that are hidden from view, and how we, as the body of Christ, can continue to strive towards a kingdom of equality.

In our third and fourth week, our question changed to, “Where does it hurt?” and we delved deeply into the personal stories we hold where hurt resides and the call to create a community that invites us to share those stories and for them to be validated and honored. As we followed up, we started to dive into the bigger questions about the systematic stories that swirl around us and the stories that point us to action.

In the last two weeks, our question became, “What do you need?” We started in the first week asking the question and this past week, we started to answer the question for ourselves. And now, we come into our two final weeks of the series, and the question, “Where do we go from here?” Where does this new awareness about ourselves and others in light of God’s action through the Holy Spirit take us from here on out?

When I first thought about the question we were asking today, it

sounded more like an ending than a beginning. I assure you though that we often find a new beginning during an ending, and we see that in our Scripture today.

1. The Word

This Sunday, we heard one of my favorite narratives of

Scripture, where we see Ruth choosing to step outside of her comfort zone. After facing the grief of losing her husband and seeing the grief of her mother-in-law, she could have chosen Orpah’s path. If she did, it wouldn’t have been sinful – Orpah’s journey seemed to be the one she needed to take. Ruth feels a different future within her, one that seems Spirit-driven, where she can see that there is a beginning amid the ending.

 It requires her to rethink her entire life – all that she’s known and all that she’s become accustomed to – from her cultural practices, to her religious values, and the generational gap between her and Naomi. She begins again and she redefines what it looks like for her to embrace the word ‘family’. She looks at her mother-in-law in the eyes, unwilling to flee or falter, and firmly tells her that they are bound together – that Naomi’s pain is her pain, that Naomi’s joy is her joy, and that Naomi’s journey has now become their journey. Naomi will not walk alone.

 There’s a beautiful covenantal promise found within this exchange. A covenant is more than words spoken or a vow, it transcends a human agreement. It is a promise that is made before God and often in the presence of others. Ruth covenants to be with Naomi until the end of their days – it is not a promise alone to Naomi, but one that is divinely tied to their life together.

1. The Word for our world

There are so many beautiful directions we could move to in this

exchange as we look at our lives together. My friends, we have faced a lot of grief and trauma in the last few years. We have seen grief in the traditional sense, losing family and friends who have entered the Heavenly Kingdom, to other griefs, significant as well – like the loss of a job, a friend who has moved away, or a family that has become disconnected. On top of that, we’ve faced the Pandemic, and we’ve been in spaces where we have felt isolated, lonely, scared, and that life would never be the same. My friends, we have seen so much within our years and still, we sit among these pews and still we proclaim that God is faithful and calling us here.

 Without saying it, perhaps we have felt it, we know that all of those griefs and traumas could have undone us, but our resilience has kicked in. We’ve chosen to see that in all of the undoing, we have not become undone - we have become transformed. The church I stand here before is different from the church that I stood before when I first came here in 2016. I see people who are willing to do the hard work, people who are engaging in these difficult questions of this series, and people who long for their church to thrive and evolve. It hasn’t been a walk in the wildflowers at times, but the beauty always overshadows any challenges.
 For those of you who do not sit in many committee meetings, I need to share with you that since we’ve come back into the pews, I have seen so much energy. Our CoCaMo folks – which stands for Congregational Care and Mission and Outreach is thriving and folks are jumping in and excited about the ways in which they can engage. I’m watching the Christian Education Committee evolve and the energy in that room is busting at the seams. Our Worship Committee is continuing to dream up new ways of worshipping together. Our Session is back at the dinner table in the manse and as I moderate, I see the passion of others to not only have this church of Christ sustain but thrive. And the list goes on. The reason I tell you is twofold – one, I like being able to share about what you may not be seeing outside of Sunday morning worship. Secondly, it’s an opportunity to say that when everything felt like it could come to an end, the doors of the sanctuary were closed and then slowly reopened – this community decided to say that this was not an ending, but a beginning, with new opportunities around the corner. As a pastor, not only am I proud, but I love being able to offer you that light during what was a difficult and dark time of being apart.

 While I don’t want to judge Orpah’s journey, because I think it’s valid – it still reminds me that she took what felt like the easy road out. Maybe it was divinely led, maybe it wasn’t – I don’t know. She went back to the comforts of home. Yet, I can’t help but have great respect for Ruth who said – when things get tough, we come together, and we become stronger with and for one another.

 I see this in our community as well. Yes, some have left and some were called away to other journeys and other explorations of faith. There is sadness, but no fault to be found and we pray that those who have left find their faithfulness renewed in their journey. Yet I am grateful and have great admiration for those who faithfully have said that Springfield is a family and this family sticks together when the going gets tough. I am so proud, once again, and particularly through this series, we’ve had the integrity, vulnerability, and strength to say to one another – who you are is important to me, I will hear where your heart hurts and seek to be present, and I will ask you what you need, and vis-versa. People have committed to diving deeper and alike Ruth, you’ve said, your pain is my pain, your joy is my joy, and your journey is our journey. I know that when the prayers of the people come, some of you will be writing down notes of who needs prayer, who needs a card sent – you are listening, you are taking this community beyond Sunday morning. Thanks be to God for a community like this.

1. Where do we go from here – week 1

So, on this first week of asking the question, “Where do we go

from here?” you are given the invitation to dream and imagine in new ways. Will you continue the conversations that have begun during this series? Will you covenant to remain in the community even when it’s tough? Will you journey together?

 I say this often, but it’s true – “Where will you go from here?” is not a question I can answer for you. It will involve prayer, discernment, and meditating on the Word. So this week, I simply ask that you do just that. As you think about the questions in this series, what do you want to do next with them? Something simple, but might be helpful, is taking a post-it note and writing, “where do we go from here?” on it and put it near your toothbrush – every morning and every night, the question is read and put on your heart. May asking this question lead you as we continue to be the community that Christ calls us to be in this time and place. Amen.