May 24th , 2020

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Seventh sunday of Easter

**The Christian Calling**

1. Lectio Divina

 This past week, I participated in a devotional that shared this reading in the Lectio Divina format. Lectio Divina is a spiritual practice and is Latin for ‘Sacred Reading’. There are a few ways to engage in the practice, but one of the most common ways is hearing the scripture read three times and then focusing on what really stands out to you today. What are the words or phrases that push or pull or challenge – maybe words that make you question something more and phrases that you find comfort in.

 When it was first read, I have to admit that I was not overly comforted by the ‘fiery ordeal’ and the ‘something strange’ that is going on. But the reason for that discomfort is because we are in that reality – something strange is going on. People are suffering, we are seeing things that we never have before, and this fiery ordeal of sorts will be a part of our personal and global history in many years to come.

 What no one wants to hear, or no one likes to think about is that hard reality of Christianity: just because you are a Christian, just because you do good works, unfortunately it doesn’t make you exempt from hardship. I wish it did, that would be wonderful. Yet, in this reading, we see it - through the ages, that being a Christian is not for the faint of heart.

 And, as it turns out, Christian or not, you’ll always face some hardship, something strange or some fiery ordeal on some level. That is the human experience. There are good times, there are bad times, there are in between times – and we live and love and experience the whole range of life.

II. Where’s the Hope

 If you are thinking, ‘wow, this passage is really bumming me out’ – just wait. If you are wondering where the hope can be found, all you need to do is read on. While we are not exempt from suffering, it is a game changer when we are a child of Christ. Yes, we suffer, but now we suffer together. Yes, we ache, but instead of walking the road alone, God is right there with us. Yes, we struggle, but we have a God who can face our anger, our anxieties, our stresses, and because of his great love and mercy, he will take them on.

 The other part of this spiritual practice brought out the last sentence for me, which was a deep comfort – this sense that Christ himself will restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. When we follow the calling to be a Christian, we are laying our lives on solid ground, a firm foundation, even in times of suffering.

III. The Calling

 This passage gives us a lot of information on what it means to be a Christian. Here’s some important take-aways: to be a Christian means that you will suffer like everyone else, but instead of suffering alone, you suffer with God and in community that sustains you. To be a Christian means that some folks might be cruel, mean, dismissive of your faith – and it hurts, it’s happened to me, but the Spirit resides and will comfort you. To be a Christian means you have to humble yourself, to really acknowledge whose you are – that God is God and you are not – and in humility, we let go. To be a Christian means that you can cast your anxieties on God, because he cares for you – he wants to know what the longings of your heart are and wants to intercede to grant you comfort. To be a Christian means that you want to be disciplined – disciplined in reading the Word, in applying it to your life, and to keeping alert to those things that are not in line with the values of love that Christ has taught us. To be a Christian means you may face evil head on, but God is a God of grace, who will restore you, hold you, support you, strengthen you, and guide you from the wilderness into new life.

 To be a Christian, to follow the call of discipleship, certainly has it’s own set of benefits and struggles. Yet as we join together this morning, even virtually, we are reminded that we are God’s own and that we are in this together.

IV. Where will I go from here

 Now, this is a lot of information, a lot to process and there will be a time where you will have to question what all of this calling means to you – what it means in your modern life as you endure suffering but also experience immense joy in Christ’s light. Unfortunately, I can’t answer that question or reflection for you, but I hope you give it thought in this week to come.

 What I can share with you is a little snippet of how I have been seeing this Word take shape in my life. Last October, when I was at CREDO, a program for newly ordained ministers, I sat down with one of the leaders. I told her about a story and I said that it wasn’t fair – I had a righteous anger, no one would or could deny it – but she just looked me in the eyes and said, “Becca, God never promised it was going to be fair.” And I kind of sat there in that moment, recognizing that truth. Life sometimes is not fair, if you want to blast God on it in anger, that’s ok, but for me – sitting and accepting that life isn’t fair allowed me to move on.

 Once I kind of accepted that truth, my perspective changed. I try to practice giving my anxieties to God, especially in these nebulous times and the truth is – sometimes I’m good at it, sometimes I’m...less good at it. I’m also really alert in these days to what’s going on in our world and seeing where things align with the Christ I know and love. I might not change the world, but I can be alert and change those things I do have control over – to be really prayerful that what I’m doing is in line with what God is calling me to do.

 And over all of this, like an umbrella, I’m still comforted by those last words in the passage – that I will be strengthened, restored, supported, and established on solid ground. Whatever comes, the Spirit covers me – The Word doesn’t change, but the Word changes me.

V. Word

 This week, I implore you to practice lectio divina – try it on as a spiritual practice and read this passage three times and see how God is speaking to you. Let the Word wash over you, let the Word teach you something new, and even if it is one word that remains on your heart, let it change you, let it move you to something more, as you seek to live out a life of discipleship and love in Jesus Christ. Amen.