May 12th, 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Fourth Sunday of Eastertide

10:30 am

A Part of the Shepherd’s Flock

1. Remember Your Baptism

This morning, I have the wonderful honour, alongside Rev. Malcolm, to baptize Harrison. I also have the joy of asking you to remember your own baptism. And in all this beauty, I get to share with you that you are a part of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ’s, flock and that you are called beloved. It’s a pretty good morning to be a pastor, because what is sweeter news than lifting up God and God’s people.

This morning, we use ordinary elements, water from the tap, blessed to mean something more profound. We take this water and place it upon Harrison, to say, ‘You are God’s very own and we take on the responsibility and privilege of loving and teaching you, just as we were loved in our own baptisms.’ Harrison will not remember this day in five years or in ten, but we have the joy of journeying alongside him and reminding him of this day.

You also will have the call of reaffirming your own baptism, to stand up and say the Apostle’s Creed – where you will call Jesus your Saviour, renounce all evil, and join with believers in claiming God’s call on your life. When we say the Apostle’s Creed together, we do no small thing. For some of us who are cradle Christians, this creed becomes rote in our head, but again and again I challenge us to put power behind those words as they come from our mouths.

II. The Sheep

As beloved people who reclaim their faith, we turn to our reading from the Psalms this morning where we are called to look at our familiar metaphor of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and us as God’s flock. We are a people who are led, who have a tendency to stray, a people who get distracted, a people who sin, and yet – God as the Good Shepherd leads us back right to where we need to be. Sometimes that’s gently, sometimes that feels not-so-gentle, but God intentionally calls all beloved.

III. At the Table

Sometimes, at least for me, it’s hard to see everyone as a child of God. I mean, I do, I believe that – but when the grit hits the ground, practicing that belief can be tough. As some of you know, I was away in North Carolina this past week at a Worship and Arts conference, and the theme of the conference was ‘At the Table’. We had the challenge of facing that reality – that we like to sit at convenient tables with the sheep we like. We naturally sit with people who have common interests, share the same skin tone, and those with a similar background. We do it because it’s comfortable – we don’t even necessarily do it because we don’t like other people – but we are drawn to our commonalities.

And that’s no bad thing. It’s no bad thing unless your table is closed. Closed to those who are often marginalized, those who are often left out, or those who are socially awkward. Here’s the good and bad news: they are God’s sheep, they are our siblings, they are also beloved.

In full humility and vulnerability, I have to admit, sometimes I close my table off. Sometimes I sit at tables I really do not want to sit at. For instance, this past week, a nice lady from Little Rock, Arkansas, who is a super-duper-extrovert, called me over to her table to share a meal of gumbo. She told me all about her love of Jimmy Buffett and Cheerwine. And it wasn’t that she wasn’t kind or nice or lovely – but really, I did not want to be at this table. I had nothing in common, or at least, visibly, common with her – I like Cheeseburger in Paradise, but I really didn’t need to delve into Jimmy’s best hits – and I’m allergic to gumbo. But I sat there still, and though I was tired and kind of annoyed and gritting my teeth because I just wanted to get on with other stuff – I listened. She invited me to the table – she saw me as a beloved child of God – and now, I was called to do the same.

The good news and bad news is this: sometimes you’ll sit at a table with a bunch of misfit artists that you totally jive with and sometimes you’ll be allergic to gumbo and hear about Jimmy Buffett. And you know what? Both of those tables are important, because at the very essence, we remember who and whose we are: the beloved children, the sheep of the flock, of Jesus Christ. And as it turned out, by the week’s end, I really came to like this woman – pulling me out of my comfort zone.

And here’s another tough reality – sometimes you’re in the position where you have all the table privileges, but there were times this week that despite the fact that I was in a room with a bunch of art loving Christians – I wasn’t invited to some tables. To the folks who had known each other for ten years and their own inside jokes, no one called on me. For some of the southerners who still called me a Yankee, I didn’t belong to their table. Sometimes we know the pain of looking around the room and recognizing that we do not fit in – sometimes we are the odd one out. Sometimes it is the Jimmy Buffett lady reminding you that maybe you don’t have completely similar interests – you’re still important, you’re still beloved, and your are welcome at God’s table.

IV. The Sheep

We are God’s own, each and every one of us, called to sit and eat and drink with one another, and called to the font of blessing of baptism. We are called to community, to be with one another: the athletes, the artists, the intellectuals – but even more so – the refugee, the hurricane survivor, the sexual assault survivor, the adopted and orphaned, the disheveled, the uneducated, the one who barely speaks our language, and beyond. We are called to listen to one another’s stories, with integrity, and to recognize that the flock is not geographical or socioeconomically divided – there we all are on this big meadow called earth.

V. The Lord is my Shepherd

As God’s sheep, we remember that God has his hand on us, and that those familiar and comforting words of Psalm 23 ring true: we are led – led by the still waters, restoring us, sending us in the direction we are called at to fulfill God’s will. When we have the dark night of the soul, we remember this passage so clearly – that though everything feels like it’s falling apart, maybe there’s things that are falling in place – and that God’s love and comfort will cover us. As we live, as we take each breath, we are also see that goodness and mercy will follow us, will hold us, will carry us, this day and always, even when we cannot see it. The truth of Psalm 23 lifts us up and reminds us who and whose we are.

And now, as we baptize Harrison, may you remember those words of the Psalm, may you know your own baptism, and recognize that all are beloved. May we celebrate this sacrament together as a community of the beloved, supporting one another, and encouraging Harrison and all on this journey we call faith. Amen.