**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**October 16th, 2022**

**Paul’s To Do List**

1. **Introduction**

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

In our third 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. In our fourth week, we started to dive into the bigger questions about the systematic stories that swirl around us and the stories that point us to action.

Last week, we considered, in light of all that we’ve explore, how do we answer the question, “What do you need?” Today, as we come before the Word, we will witness to the psalmist and Paul who courageously and beautifully name before God and their community what they need.

1. The Word

So let us begin with the Word, first looking at our Psalmist who

vulnerably comes before God. The Psalmist is asking for things to occur immediately – there is no time to wait, for the needs they feel run deep and feel imminent. The Psalmist needs his life to be preserved and he knows that this need can only be provided by God. He needs joy, goodness, and forgiveness. He knows, but perhaps he needs to be reassured, that even when things get really bad, even when trouble is right before him, that God will always provide. He needs God’s teachings and to give him an undivided heart that is purely focused on serving God. He needs God to protect him from the trouble around him. He needs God’s strength and grace and a sign to show that God is here. Yet even in this litany of needs, this list of things that are so close to this psalmist’s heart, you can clearly see that his he is grateful towards God and he sees God as the provider of all these needs.

 Paul’s needs do not ring like a melody like the Psalmist, but one could say he’s straightforward about his needs. He needs his friend Mark to join him, because he’s had to send other friends away for ministry and he’s also been abandoned by others. He needs his cloak, his books, and his parchments. This is a nice to-do list that the reader of the letter can provide, but if you dig a little bit deeper, I think there’s more than meets the eye in his tangible requests.

 I think Paul is crying out for community, because even though he sent some folks away and he does have Luke near him, it seems that he feels lonely and he needs another companion for the journey. Within this, I think Paul is also saying he needs support – maybe he hopes that when Mark comes, Mark will come and envelope him in a hug and reassure him that what he is doing in ministry is worth it. Paul needs his cloak – he needs a tangible sign of home, a sign of comfort, that he can wrap around his shoulders to feel safe from the trouble that he’s seen. Paul needs his books, and I understand Paul truly here – he needs a reminder of all he’s learned and maybe he needs to reread some things, just to assert everything he’s been teaching. He needs his parchment, to dream new dreams and to write letters to other communities.

 There is a strong tie between the Psalmist and Paul – they both see that they are facing trouble and there are folks who do not want the best for them. Yet they know that God is faithful, they trust that God will provide and they are grateful. The sound of gratitude and praise will always be louder than any needs they share with God or their community.

1. Paul’s To Do List

I must admit that when I first read the passage about Paul, I first

read it as a little assertive, which isn’t a bad thing – but I must acknowledge that I kind of thought - why does he need his books, his cloak, and his parchments? They are just things, right?

 But that’s when we have to read between the lines. It’s a silly example, but from last week, when I say, “I need dark chocolate” – we laugh, right? I don’t need chocolate, it will not sustain my life, it will not cure me from all troubles, right? No. But it’s a funny example of how we can get curious – maybe I need it to offer me comfort, maybe I need a little caffeine push, maybe I need it as a sign and symbol that you know me and love me. Now, I’m not sure chocolate can fill all those needs, but again – there’s often a need much more important behind the façade that Paul shows us in his cloak, books, and parchment.

 This week, I wonder if you started to ask what you need. It can start small – maybe you need a walk around the block to get your legs moving, or maybe you are thinking of booking a holiday somewhere warm and toasty during the winter time, or maybe you, like Paul, need a cloak or some comfy clothes. But we know that there are deeper needs there, right? You need the wonder of creation to remind you of God’s presence as you stretch your legs, you need the warmth of God’s grace to envelope you in sunshine, or maybe you need the peace and comfort of those comfy clothes to feel like you are getting a great big and loving hug.

 There’s always a need behind a need. That’s what I am seeing in these Scriptures, and these questions, and God’s call for us to be more emboldened in community and get vulnerable.

1. Ugh, Vulnerability

This is now a part of the sermon I am least looking forward to,

but if I am going to tell you to dig deep, if I am going to ask you what you need – I need to set a proper example of what it looks like to share what I need.

 This week, I went deep within myself and did a self-inventory of those things that weigh most heavily on me and those things that give me joy. I highly recommend this practice – because you are granted clarity on how to press forward.

 Many of you know that when I got married, I moved north to the PA border with the hope of finding a house halfway and doing that swiftly, but things pop up – whether that’s waiting for supplies, finding a half-day to paint, or pulling up carpet. Between Bryan and myself, we feel like chickens with our heads cut off – trying to find the balance, but the demands on time are high.

 So I asked myself – what do I need? What do I need to best live into my vocation as a minister, a spouse, a daughter, etc.? I think I need to ask for help. I need to ask if someone would be willing to paint with me one day. I need to find out if someone can teach us some handyman skills. I also need to learn how to delegate and to not have a Savior complex where I can always do all things for all people. All of these are very tangible needs – but they point to a larger one – the true need to be free of those things that are pulling me back from living into my vocation fully. The full need is to live more abundantly into the call that God has set upon my heart.

 Do you know how vulnerable and hard that is to admit? To ask for help in our culture feels very isolating, it feels vulnerable, and often, we find that we’re in a society where folks are supposed to have a stiff upper lip, hide their needs, and carry on stoically.

 Yet the Scriptures prove differently, don’t they? Paul and the Psalmist are unashamed to ask for what they need – they name it, because they know that God will provide. They know that there is a community that is much bigger than themselves. They understand that to need is not to err, not to be less, but simply to be human.

 I hope my vulnerability here this morning opens up your hearts to vulnerably name the things that your heart needs. I hope you hear me, but more so, believe me, as I validate that your needs are real and that through God and this community, we can use our time and talents to help one another to all live abundantly. Keep on asking the question my friends, dare to say it aloud, and in and through it all, know that the God of us all is holding you and will always be faithful as we walk through this life together. And as we live into this life together, with these questions asked and answered, may we point to God as provider and give our thanks and praise as we seek to be the body of Christ. Amen.