Springfield Presbyterian Church

April 11th, 2021

4th Sunday After Easter

Part of the Vineyard

1. The Roundtable

Recently, I have had the blessing of working in the Presbytery with both pastors and laity on the general topic of ‘equity.’ I knew the topic would be challenging on many forefronts – from the recent trial about George Floyd, from Baltimore’s Freddie Grey, and the collective inequity we’ve seen throughout this pandemic. As we sat in our virtual small groups, it became very apparent that my mind was only skimming the surface of the questions we were asking.

 As it turns out, in community, we shared question after question, rather than any answers. One question spurred on another, and our conversations from racial inequity became larger as we considered all forms of inequity – from wealth, to disability, to gender, and so on. We spoke about the wealth division between our black and white churches, where the white churches often had deeper pockets or endowments or reserves, whereas our black churches did not have that luxury. We spoke about the inequity of disability, of creating and crafting a church where all people can truly worship, from physical disability, to emotional, and intellectual – a place where all can thrive. We spoke about the pangs of injustice over the dent that we have created in the LGBTQ+ communities where we have demeaned, belittled, and left out folks in our conversations. As well meaning Christians and the body of Christ, we wanted to fix it all, we wanted to mend decades and centuries of pain, and yet we were left in uncomfortable silence, not knowing what to do, perhaps feeling overwhelmed.

 At the close of our most recent conversation, someone asked the good and fair question: “Where are we trying to get to? What is our end goal?” And none of us could answer with even a remote level of integrity. For me, I think the point, at least for the time being, is that the conversation is open, that we are aware that we need to have these conversations, and I’m not sure where we will end up and whether it will be fruitful, but it is the work of the body to listen to God’s call for equity.

1. The Vineyard

I believe all of these topics can be so enormous that it seems there is no place to begin, but I find great hope and encouragement from our Scripture lesson this morning. Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches. From Jesus, we are equipped for the work of growing the vineyard, we are given sustenance and nourishment, and we are led by God’s power to create dynamic change in the world. And each of our branches are made equal – we are in this together, it is an act of community and solidarity. Each of us will have our own call; our own passion that we will derive great energy from. For some of us, it will be the call to equity in wealth, or gender, or race, or indigenous people, or so on. God has crafted in everyone one of us the call and desire in our hearts to be passionate about what God has laid on our hearts.

 When I find myself in these conversations, I admittedly, am overwhelmed – but only because I want to heal every inequality, every pain that has been made known, and set right the things I believe God is calling each of us to in this life. And then I realize that – one, I was not called to save the world, that’s Jesus, and two – I can’t do it all, but I can seek equality and justice and a way forward with each of you. We can get behind one another, support one another, encourage each other in our individual calls to make sense out of an unjust world.

1. And we can’t do it without God

In the community of Christ, we are empowered, but it is critical to remember where that power is derived from – for it is the gathered community, but it is the community that God has created. We are here in this zoom room, in this strange sanctuary of sorts, to encourage, bless, and uphold one another, but we are remiss if we forget where that power comes from, which is God alone.

 We are called to abide in Christ, to cling to the Word, and to know where we get our call from and to praise the maker who is creating us for good each and every day.

1. For Everyone Born

Following our time of communion this Sunday, we will gather together and sing one of my favorite hymns – For Everyone Born by the late Sheila Erena Murray. She beautifully tied in all of these very tangible recognitions of the equality that we are called to. She writes – for everyone born, a place at the table, for everyone born, clean water and bread, a safe place growing, a shelter, a space, a place where young and old and men and women are cherished. And as we do this important work, for everyone born, God rejoices and celebrates the justice that is being co-created in this world by his children who seek to stretch the branches of the vineyard further and further.

1. The overwhelming call

 My sincere question to you this morning, is by no means easy – it will involve prayer, discernment, and energy. In recognizing that we cannot do everything and that it is by God’s Spirit that we are called, here’s the key question: what act or acts of justice are you called to in this time and place.

 I always thought that my answer to this question would remain the same, but as I grow, my call changes and transforms. As someone who now faces the world of disability and health insurance phone calls that make you grit your teeth and pull out your hair – I now have a more impassioned desire to create a church that not only accommodates disability, but celebrates the diversity there-within. I am asking the difficult questions, not only of Springfield, but our local churches within the Presbytery. Questions like, “What would you do if your elevator broke that Sunday, would you turn away a worshipper?” or “If someone in my community is struggling with dyslexia, what are ways in which I can help make worship a place that is safer and more accessible” or “For those who struggle in the face of emotional disabilities, such as depression, anxiety, and so on – how are we the church that reaches out, but does so in a way that welcomes in and eases that emotional weight.”

 For everyone born, I pray, someday, for everyone born – there will be a place at the table. We aren’t there yet. So what are you called to in this season? What acts of justice, ways of being, and conversations do you and we need to be having right now? Trusting in the fortifying nourishment of God’s grace and power, how do we gather around you and one another in making this world more just?

 It can be huge, it can be small, the call is not necessarily to a Nobel Peace Prize, but dream, consider, pray, discern, and then lift your voice in this community so that we may be justice-makers, peace-keepers, and love-bearers this day and always. Amen.