Springfield Presbyterian Church

Ash Wednesday

February 22nd, 2023

 I’ve always been a bit of a seeker. I am not an adrenaline junkie by any means, but I love to linger in the mysteries of life. I am a great proponent of the question “why,” – which is probably to the great chagrin of my family. Yet here we are in this season of Lent, called to step into this pilgrimage and journey, walking both confidently and curiously into the realities of Calvary. We are here to seek, to ask the hard questions, and to wander and wonder at the ministry of the love of Jesus that would lead to crucifixion.

 There will be days on this journey where you will want the hours to feel longer, dwell in God’s presence, and be renewed by slowing down. There will be days that remind me of Isaiah’s words, “There is something springing forth – do you see it?!” and you will want to run to Easter with all your heart to get to the other side of the good news. There will be days that you forget the season we are in due to the busyness of life or other simple human distractions. These days are all part of the cumulative journey that we walk together, as we seek something new that we’ve never realized before.

 When it comes to Lent and Lenten disciplines, you’ll hear people who will give up chocolate or candy. These disciplines of giving up something can be positive – perhaps you are more grateful for what you’ve given up, or maybe you realize you don’t need this particular thing in your life.

 Others will decide to take up something new during this season as a Lenten discipline. You may be called to serve at a food bank or endeavor to do one tangible and positive thing daily. For some, taking something up can reignite a sense of living into God’s call and refocus what faith looks like in real life. This is also a beautiful discipline where discipleship is realized and it may change a mindset and reengage a call to service.

 Yet this season, I am challenged because I do not feel called to give something up or take something on. I’ve often considered these two disciplines the Lenten disciplines because they are ideas often spoken about in society. I am craving something else entirely, though – I am seeking something new, but not a new shiny object or activity. I am seeking to be present so that all that God is doing is newly revealed this season. I want to be ever mindful of the newness that goes untouched in our world. I want to go back onto the road of pilgrimage that makes our feet and backs sore as we trod the path.

 In the last few months, I have been caught up in a pattern of looking backward. I remember lively college days, or memories of summers at the shore, or adventuring in Europe. All of this is lovely, but I have lost sight of what God is doing right here. I’m caught up in yesterday's when God calls me to live today. So, tonight, my Lenten discipline will be a shift of mindset, a memory that life is short, and living in the present and walking this Lenten road is my best path of discipleship this season.

 Tonight, wherever your Lenten discipline calls you, we are reminded of something I just mentioned – life is short. We can live in the memories of yesterdays or the hopes of the future, but the present and living in the present is asking God to journey with us, right here and now. As we place ashes, we remember those yesterdays, those days before our birth in which we were simply dust – a thought, a dream, a wish. We, at the same time – remember that we are finite and that there will be a day where we will return to dust, existing in a future that is painted in glory where God reigns.

 As you meditate tonight, I hope you can think about a discipline that best serves you as you seek to glorify God. I also hope that as you stand before me, you can be mindful of the past and future, but as you are marked with ashes here in this sacred space, remember God’s call to you as God’s beloved, here in the present moment. Amen.