July 28nd– 9:30am

Springfield Presbyterian Church

11th Sunday After Pentecost

A Life Worthy of the Calling

I. Research

It was funny, as I finished reading our lectionary passage for today from the letter to the Ephesians, I immediately stumbled upon a sermon that Dr. Brene Brown, a social work professional and practicing Episcopalian, preached at the Washington National Cathedral in January of this past year. The first part of our letter today, talks about the importance of unity – and how while we are always transforming and growing, it is clear that unity is part of that growth.

And Dr. Brene Brown spoke what many of us know in our own daily lives. She spoke of the factions that we have created, over the last 20 years, but especially the last three, where we continue to divide ourselves by ideology. We do something she calls ‘sorting’ – where we live with, hang out with, go to school with people who believe like us. But here’s the ironic part – you’d think that in this sorting, you’d be hanging out with your best friends – that you’d have this deep connection due to commonalities in ideology. The irony lies in the fact that...that’s simply not true. The more we’ve sorted and divide ourselves, the statistics on loneliness rates have increased expenetionally. While there’s more research to be done, she says that there’s this sociological thing that’s happening in these sorted groups, called ‘common enemy intimacy’ – and basically, that means ‘I don’t know you, I don’t particiularly like you, I’m not interested in getting to know you – I’m just glad you hate the same people I do.’

And this initial assessment, of this ‘common enemy intimacy’ made me sit in an uncomfortable spot. Because I knew it was true, for me, if I really wanted to admit it. As I went through my Facebook feed, the few friends I have who have different ideologies, I feel an inner anger at them, or just frustration, or I think they aren’t educated, they don’t know better. I always take the higher ground. I’m not proud of that – but I feel it within myself. But then, by far, as I look at all the other friends who share my ideological points of view – I, on a surface level, think they’re great – but many I wouldn’t say I have some deep connection with, or rather, they aren’t necessarily people I’d call in crisis. In truth – I don’t know some of them well, and I don’t try to get to know them, I just like they are ‘on my side.’

II. Justice vs. Unity

And I realized, when I had to look closely in that mirror, that while I’m good and blessed and a child of God, that I’ve been prone to jumping on the bandwagon of my own ideology and shut down the conversation on the other side of the ideological values. But, I can’t live out my calling – as a minister, as a child of God, as a wife, as a daughter, as a sister, as an aunt, as an artist, etc. – I can’t live out the calling in an abundant way if I’m not willing to share the peace of Christ with someone whose values are different then mine.

Now, let me throw a wrench in here, because I also found this passage to be deeply challenging because while I can sit here and preach about unity and be pro-unity and come to this kum-by-yah mentality where we are all one – the thing that really got under my skin that I had to chat to Jesus about was this – But God, what about those people who have ideologies that are really damaging. What about those folks who think LGBTQ people should be stoned, what about those folks who are out for their own gain but don’t care about the loss of others, what about those folks who discriminate based on the colour of your skin rather than the character of your person. What about those folks, God? You can’t expect me to be unified with them.

And, as always, there’s a yes-but answer that comes from this discernment. We are called to strive for justice, equality, and to stand up against any discrimination – but when we start to call people names, when we dehumanize them, when we treat them as less than the children of God that they are because of the ideology they hold...we lose. We lose because we trap ourselves in anger, in hatred, in frustration, and we forget that despite our differences, even the unjust differences, hatred will get us nowhere, but love just might.

III. Loneliness

Another real aspect of this unification is not that we only do it for God, or for others, but when we are unified, we actually are helping ourselves. I said before that the rates, the statistics of loneliness have increased. In the UK, they did a five year study on loneliness in the British Isles and in December of 2017, the Parliament actually appointed a ‘Minister for Loneliness’. Now, maybe you’re thinking – that’s crazy, that’s a waste of tax payers money. But it’s been proven that loneliness is a higher indicator of early death, more than smoking, obesity, or excessive drinking. I don’t know how the research works, but that’s what it tells us. And what it tells me is – we’re better together, not only for the sake of the Kingdom, the sake of one another, but the sake of ourselves.

IV. As A Unified People

So, as a unified people, as a people seeking to be the body of Christ in new and diverse ways, Paul calls the Ephesians to live a life worthy of the calling. What does that even mean? It sounds lovely, but where do we begin?

We know that many people have many different gifts, and all of these are gifts from God. Trust me, you might want to have me preach, but if there’s some kind of physics DIY project that needs to happen, you do not want me on that. Right, we all have certain gifts, we all are called to use them to better the body of Christ. And it’s important that we recognize those gifts and find out what they are – really soul search, and see where we are called to act. The first step of this statement is knowing who we are and whose we are – how we can serve, and where God has gifted us.

Some folks can get hung up on this idea of being ‘worthy’ of the calling. And in our current cultural climate – to some extent, that’s fair. Being ‘worthy’ is something that most people struggle with – I’m not worthy, I want to be humble, I’m just one part of many, I’m not good enough to live out a calling of real integrity. Wrong. I’m a child of God, I’ve been gifted to serve in a particular ministry, I’m called to live a life in the light where I offer my gifts to build up the body of Christ. I am worthy, I will always be worthy, even if I were to sit on my bed each and everyday – because I am a child of God. That’s all that I need – that’s all that determines my worthiness.

IV. The Challenge

As we break this bread and as we share this wine, despite our different ideologies, whether big or small, let us come to this table as a united people, because we are united as children of God. And after you leave the table, don’t let that be the end of the call of unity – I’m not asking you to start debates, I’m asking you, as hard as it is – and as hard as it is for me, or for anyone – let’s try to find some common ground. I don’t care if that common ground is as basic as ‘we like the same kind of TV shows but we disagree on everything else’ – OK, great. Start somewhere, find the humanity in someone else, find the commonalities instead of dwelling on each of the things that pulls you further apart from other beloved people of God.

And the second task at hand – is, use your gifts to build up the body of Christ, here at SPC and in our larger community. And if you don’t know what your gift is – let’s talk, call me, text me, e-mail me – because no one can say ‘oh, I don’t have any gifts, I don’t have any talent.’ No, God has gifted you and equipped you, and if you need help to figure out what that is and how to use – let’s talk – that’s why we are here together.

My friends, may we be the unified body of Christ in all we do and serve God with our diverse gifts that will build up this body but also build up the Kingdom at large so that Christ’s love may be felt in all corners of this world. Amen.