March 22nd, 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

4th Sunday of Lent

10:30am

Wilderness of Coronavirus – Virtual Church – Week One

Everyday Holiness

1. All the Books

For years, I’ve gathered books, I’ve placed them on a bookshelf, and while I have many more to read from the shelf, I have always felt protected by them. For any topic – there is a book, or so I’ve been told. I would be safe, because the words would be there, and I would find hope and comfort. Yet, when I took to my bookshelves this week, there didn’t happen to be a book on, ‘Virtual Ministry during a time of Pandemic.’ Now, I’m sure there will be a book written on this topic, if not a few, after we get past this crisis – but for now, we live in unchartered waters.

So I had to delve a little deeper and I reflected upon what I’ve seen in just this past week. I’ve seen fear, I’ve seen scarcity, I’ve heard numbers that have gone up in cases, I’ve heard news that has made me question what is real or not real. I’ve felt an anxiety, one that I find most people share, but I’ve also felt a sense of hopelessness. Earlier on in the week, I kept coming to the Cliffside, to the edge of what I know, and I kept asking – how does a minister do ministry right now? I can’t hug the bereft, I can’t sit down over tea or coffee and talk about the issues of the day, and I can’t be with the people I love greatly in one room. How do I do this? How do we do this? How are we God’s people, the hands and feet of Jesus, in a time where the best advisement we have is to close our doors and stay inside.

This is a really hard question and I’m not sure I yet have an answer to it, but I have some beginning thoughts. I reflected upon what my fears are – and they are more complex than I thought they would be: I’m worried not only about your physical health, but I’m worried about your mental health, your spiritual health, your routines that are off kilter because they give us grounding in life. I’m worried about those in isolation, those who do not have a computer to log on to or a TV to watch to pass the time. I’m concerned about those who work in retail and other essential businesses to keep me stocked up and well fed, but are risking their lives at the same time. I worry about those who do not have the luxury of a rainy-day fund, or are not salaried, and don’t know where to turn. And of course, I’m most concerned about those who are immunocompromised, those who are vulnerable populations, and those on the front lines.

As you can tell, it’s pretty easy to get absorbed in worry and anxiety – and if you aren’t worried or anxious...I’m anxious for you. Let me normalize this for you right here and right now – if you are feeling worried, or scared, or helpless, you are not alone, you are loved, and I promise you, and we have the Scriptures to back this up – we will be together again, and we will get through this together. It will be hard, it will be challenging, but you are not alone and if you need to reach out – even if you just feel a little nudge – reach out, because we are all going to have to find new ways to hold each other these days.

II. An uplifting message

What I’ve said here, is much of what you already know. So, how do we begin to see God active and at work here in this place, when we are at home. Well, there is one book, of course...when I looked beyond my very directive title that was helpful. It’s a book called ‘Active Spirituality’ by Kent Ira Groff. What he proposes is not actually overly radical, but a good reminder because it is so easy to forget.

Everything you do can be sacred. Yes. Everything. Now, Kent goes to the extent that cleaning your toilet to be sacred – I haven’t gotten that far with him quite yet, but, I appreciate the sentiment. But I can get on board with some of the other active sacred moments he shares – things like carefully making a bed for a guest to come, weeding a plot of your garden to tend to the land, checking the mail, cleaning the car, talking to a friend on the phone, and even learning how to virtually worship with your church family! And the neat thing about this is that, really, it’s up to you to choose what is holy and what is sacred. You can make the choice to turn on some music and file things away and maybe it’s a mundane task, or maybe it’s a time to simply actively engage in a kind of mindfulness time. You don’t need to be praying during that time, but simply doing an action of some kind, and letting that be holy.

I think when we consider holiness or sacredness, we have to be doing something big – right? We need to be in these pews, or we need to be saying the Lord’s prayer, or we need to be singing hymns together – and all of that is indeed holy, but let us not limit ourselves. I know people give the hippies a bad time, but maybe they had it right all along – go out and enjoy nature, bake something with care and tenderness, let all of your life become one stream of prayer and holiness. And when that happens, the anxiety dissipates, little by little, because our focus is on God and we notice God alive and at work.

III. Practical Steps

So, I’m going to challenge you to some tangible, practical steps this upcoming week. There’s a little something for anyone and everyone on my list, so you decide what feels right. Here’s some ideas of how to bring holiness into your life, and there’s so many, I’ll send out a more throrough list...but let’s start here.

I want some of you to write some cards. To people you don’t know. I want you to write to Martins and Safeway and Home Depot – I want you to write and address the retail folks to let them know how grateful you are for their tireless work, often underrated, and thank them for stocking the shelves and for risking their lives to keep our bellies full and our families fed. I want you to write to small business owners, letting them know that you stand alongside them, because they took a big risk to become small business owners to begin with, and encourage them, let them know that when it is safe, you will come and be patrons again. I want you to write to your schools, address it to the custodians – and thank them for cleaning our schools and being where the germs are and often doing it for very little money and very little thanks. And then write letters to those you think could use a word of encouragement – the shut in, the person whose job has just been cut, the parents who are learning how to become homeschool teachers and work at the same time. Words have a way of encouraging us, bearing us up, and bringing us hope. If you need cards, envelopes, I will do my best to provide as much as I can at this time.

Call people. Text people. We often don’t know what people need. A loaf of bread dropped off on a doorstep might be the brightest part of a person’s day right now. Check in, with yourselves and with others.

Get outside, weed, for those desperate for hugs – go hug a tree and remember that this tree has seen much more than you have. Go on a hike, go sit near the stream, go for a drive and enjoy the glorious creation God has made.

And my parting word...turn off the tv. Just for a little bit. Keep informed, stay up to date on what is mandated, but, do yourself a favor and do the actions I just talked about. Let your days become holy, sacred, and new – even in a time without structure – and in all of it, may you continue to find God and the Spirit moving through you and through our words and actions as we seek to be Christ’s hands and feet everyday and in everyway. Amen.