**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**January 16th, 2022**

**A Dove Descended**

1. Two Sacraments

This morning, we sit in an interesting and unusual position in the

church calendar – we have the wonderful opportunity to highlight the two sacraments of the Presbyterian Church - Baptism and Communion. Other sects of Christianity have more sacraments – for example, the Catholic church has seven. They have baptism and communion, of course, but they also think of marriage, last rites before death, and confirmation as sacraments.

 Those parts of our life are certainly sacred and holy, but for us, in the Protestant tradition, we think of sacraments as acts that Jesus performed and wants us to continue to perform in our present day life.

1. Baptism

Let us take a look at baptism - baptism is an act of renewal. In my modern day view, very simplistically, I like to think of it as a restart. You know how when everything starts acting up on your computer and things are freezing and you call the IT Techs and the first question they ask is… “Well, have you rebooted the computer?” and you sign and press the button and everything works again. And yes, sometimes it isn’t that easy, but sometimes it is – sometimes the computer and us both need a reboot.

When we get a reboot, we admit our humanity, our sin, and we are washed again, whether that is physically through the waters of baptism or metaphorically as we are reminded again of our baptism. We wash off the gunk – it’s like the most purifying shower you’ve ever had – and we get to start again. We remember who and whose we are and we stand up and we move on, ready and willing to be the disciples that God has called us to be.

Baptism is a joyous thing and to remember your baptism is a joyful act. I remember one afternoon when I was hanging out with the Vasbinder crew in the summertime and the sun was beating down and the heat was sweltering. As we all sat on the porch, a storm rolled in and suddenly water poured down from the skies and we laughed. I remember Nettie and I going into the front yard and doing a bit of a dance in the rain, laughing and smiling and being refreshed from the heat of the day. It was a simple joy, but a great joy, and that memory reminds me of how refreshing baptism is and maybe when we baptize a child, we should laugh and play and smile, because holy and sacred acts do not have to be wrapped up in total seriousness. Maybe God wants us to dance at this new beginning.

This sacrament though always brings up a tough question for me, every time - when we look at the baptism of Christ is the fact that this is God…he doesn’t need a reboot. He is holy, he is pure, he is cleansed, he is free from sin – he’s the last person in the world who needs baptism so…why do we see him being baptized this morning?

For me, the answer is two-fold. He is baptized as an example for what we are called to do. I like to think that Jesus wouldn’t ask us to do anything he wouldn’t do – so he goes ahead and is cleansed in the waters. As the dove descends, we are reminded that this baptism is different than simple water, but in this action by Christ, the Holy Spirit descends upon Christ and thus, upon us, in that holy moment of baptism. He is baptized as an example of what we are called to do in this Christian life.

Secondarily, I would also say that he is showing humility. He is being baptized – he isn’t saying that he’s too good for this or he’s too pure. He asks his cousin, John, to baptize him, he humbles himself. And so, we are called to that humility – to be willing to humble ourselves to be washed again and again, knowing that we are safe in the loving and renewing arms of God.

We hear this sense of the renewal of the waters in our first text this morning in Isaiah 43 – which, is a favorite of mine, if only for the hope and joy it illuminates for the reader. When you pass through the waters, I’ll hold you. I love you. You are mine. If you ever doubt the love of God and the love that God has for you so deeply, I ask you to bookmark this page in your Bible and read it aloud to yourself and remember that you are held in a love that is far far beyond what words could contain.

1. Communion

Communion is our second sacrament and it is a sacrament

because it is another experience where God tells us to continue to act. We are called in the act of communion to ‘do this in remembrance of Christ.’

 Whatever you have before you this morning is holy, because in this space, we make it holy. Some pastors would disagree – some would say you need bread and wine. We use bread and wine because we can, because that’s what we read in the Scriptures, but we also know that it was the cultural food of the time. It also has the sentiment of a larger metaphor of ‘breaking bread’ and pouring the wine is often an artistic move as the wine flows from pitcher to cup.

 Yet, again, whatever you have before you is good and holy. I remember sitting next to Bryan one night as we spoke about our faith traditions and were eating dinner and I looked at him and asked, “Why don’t you celebrate communion as a Quaker?” He looked down at our food and said, “We are celebrating communion right now.” I looked up at him and said something sassy along the lines of, “I don’t think that Surf and Turf and some ginger ale is the Lord’s meal.” But he reminded me that all of these things before me on my plate were given by God. The fish of the sea, the delicious steak, even the ginger ale – all of these things came from and by God and we get to celebrate and remember God in this moment.

 He turned the tables on what I thought could be holy and I am grateful, for every meal we have together is an opportunity to remember. Even if it’s nachos or tacos or chicken and some iced tea – God makes all things and he makes them holy and invites us not only this morning but every morning to reflect upon how sacred this sustenance is before us. And with this bigger and expansive view in mind, it means that we get to remember God’s goodness not only on a Sunday morning, but every time we share a meal together, we get to remember the meal that God shared with his disciples on that last night.

So as we come together to celebrate communion together, I’d like

you to enter that space as a baptized child of God – and, if you haven’t been officially baptized, well, come anyway – because God welcomes all to this table. Come to the table with a hope for more, a sense of joy, maybe some laughter and gratitude for those gentle and light moments where you feel the Spirit. Come to the table because that’s where we find Christ – we find him at the table, gathered with his disciples, where a simple meal becomes much more complex. Come to the table, because God is waiting for us there, he’s set the meal and he’s ready to celebrate with each of us. Come, come to the table, child of God, and be renewed. Amen.