September 9th – 9:30am

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Blessed Are The Misfits

1. Playing Favourites

Around two years ago, my sister, Heather, bought my mother a mug that said ‘My favourite daughter bought me this mug.’ The debate and teasing has been going on for decades – who is dad’s favourite, who is mom’s favourite? For as long as I remember, there has been a jesting back and forth to play out who their favourite child was – and for as long as I can remember, they both said something along the lines, ‘You’re all our favourite, just in different ways.’ It still makes me grumble, a little bit – come on, mom and dad, just secretly point to your favourite. I won’t tell anyone. Eh, but they never relented, nor do I think they ever will.

 I doubt that my story is all that different from those of you who have siblings – and it’s probably human nature. We want to be someone’s favourite. And in some areas of social order, it’s crucial to have favourites. We favour a particular political leader for their stance on issues that are important to us. We favour particular foods, colours, etc. And there’s nothing wrong about playing favourites here – because sometimes you do have to put a line in the sand.

 James, would not necessarily disagree. In the first part of his letter, he warns us against favouritism, but he also understands that favouritism is an important feature of social order. But that favouritism is really spared again for things, rather than people. What is so troubling to James is when he walks into a synagogue, probably in Alexandria, and sees the blatant division of rich and poor. The rich were esteemed, highly regarded, and beloved members of the inner being of the temple life. Yet, the poor were seen unkindly, unjustly treated, and did not have the same standing.

 At the heart of the beginning of this text is the crucial matter of unity. James uplifts the poor, but he isn’t here either to shame the rich. He isn’t, at least at this moment, to ask the rich to give away their possessions, but is sharing rather a broader view of unity: we are called to embrace both rich and poor and all who lie somewhere in-between. Do not dismiss one another, do not bad mouth or demonize one another – but rather, see the light of Christ in all.

1. Reformation Times

So, that’s the situation back in James’ day, but lets jump up to

the time of the Reformation in the early 1500s. Perhaps humanity thought they were doing better with their ethics, when they said that some poor were ‘worthy poor’ and some were ‘unworthy’ poor. The beggars who were poor and used the skills that the wealthy had taught them were seen as ‘worthy’ of charity and ‘worthy’ to be in relationship with in society. Yet, those beggars who did not take up the teachings of the rich were seen as ‘lazy’ – so they shouldn’t have a rightful place in society.

 Now, let’s jump right up to present day life, here in 2018. From James’ letter to today, it’s a picture that is painfully still true and relevant. The rich get richer, the poor get poorer, and we are living in a social order that somehow allows that to be perpetuated and carried forth. I think we are guilty of dissecting what it means to be poor when we ourselves have not felt it. I think it is easy to look at someone on the street corner and call them ‘lazy’ because they didn’t go to college or finish their high school education. I think we just as profoundly try to divert our eyes and go on our merry way. I think perhaps we show pity, when what people need is a conversation, what people need is to know that their story of struggle and loss does not divide them from the cross, what people need is love, what people need is understanding that they are worthwhile and part of this beloved community and society.

 And we are all guilty of it – myself included. It’s easy to say these words as a white girl up at the pulpit from an upper-middle class beach town, who has not had to face the daunting reality of poverty or realize what it means that there is no food in the cupboard for tomorrow’s meal, or even tonight’s dinner. I recognize that I have not felt what it means to be on the other side of the equation, but what I can do as a person of faith is to empathize, to learn, to educate, and to be a safe space for all people.

1. Faith vs. Works

In James letter, we are told that we cannot be people who

live by faith alone, but that faith and works are undeniably inseparable. Will my faith alone save me, even if it’s the most beautiful, poignant, stunning faith? What about my fantastic faith statement and ability to pontificate and meditate? No. Will the hefty works of moving boxes, providing food for the hungry, and offering rides to those in need be enough? Will teaching ESL or training someone with my gifts and skills save me? No. It’s not faith alone that will save you. It isn’t works alone that will save you either. Faith and works go together – you can’t pull them apart, because faith leads you to works. As the front of your bulletin shows you, it’s like cogs on a wheel – each cog has to be in place, faith and works have to be jointly moving together, to live the abundant life of a Christian.

1. Blessed Are the Misfits

To be a Christian means that we take our faith, we build upon

it in these walls, and then we go out and respond by what we have learned. I thought to myself this week – how else can I describe a person who does this – because sometimes the word ‘Christian’ becomes so overloaded with meaning that we lose sight of all that it encapsulates. So, the word that came to mind this week was the word ‘misfit.’

 The word ‘misfit’ has it’s own baggage though too. A misfit is often seen as the rugged one in the corner who is the troublemaker. Yet, when we get to the origin of the word ‘mis’ and ‘fit’ – it is simply defining someone who does not fit in with the social order. And as Christians, that’s actually what we’re profoundly called to do. We are called by our faith to look at this world and it’s order and not claim it as our own, but rather, to see a different way of living through Christ. We are, essentially, called to be ‘uncool’. We do not ‘fit’ in this world – and we were never meant to. We are misfits, we are people who stand in the face of the popular idea and say, ‘does that align with the faith and love that I know in my heart, borne of the Scriptures and experiences I’ve had in this life’?

 I, in truth, also probably like the word ‘misfits’ because it’s a bit edgy. Let it be from my Jersey girl personality. But, I implore you, to go out into this world and be a misfit. Do not stand for what society says is normal, do not take it as it comes, but use your faith to construct a better life for us all. Be a misfit – cause a bit of trouble – good trouble – challenge, in love, those ideas and notions that don’t sit well with you. Be a misfit – be brave, be proud, of the faith that you have learned from and the faith that leads you to action. And when you feel like the only misfit in the room, remember that you’ve got a whole room of misfits who, in our humanity, are doing the best we can together to be the body of Christ by our faith and works. So, with that, blessed be the misfits. Amen.