**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**September 5th, 2021**

**Best Practices**

1. **Adages**

When I was growing up, I heard a lot of adages, or those key

words your parents would say to you on repeat that became so engrained that even in adulthood, you just can’t seem to shake them. There’s the classics: “A penny saved is a penny earned” or “honesty is the best policy” or “if you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.” There were specific Crate family policies that also arose, such as “Lights off when you leave” and my dad was known to charge 5 cents to the one who forgot to live into that adage. There was also “Don’t put your shoes on the table” which probably came from the fact that you don’t want dirt on the table, but even clean or brand new shoes were not allowed. Another was “Don’t shut the piano lid” and that came from this idea that music was life and to shut the piano lid meant that you were grieving in some way.

We all have grown up with adages, whether the well-known ones or generationally carried ones that have been passed down throughout time. Without consciously knowing, they inform what we do and how we live on a daily basis, creating habits and teaching us how to live a good life. The adages are more or less, the best practices, of living our lives.

1. Proverbs

This segment of Proverbs, in the most casual way, could be said

to be a book of Biblical adages, or Wisdom for the day. The particular passage we are looking at today is broken down into three statements that speak to manners such as relationships, generosity, and justice.

Our relationships are summed up so simply, but in such a telling way, in the words in Proverbs: “The rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord is the maker of them all.” And it goes beyond the rich and the poor, especially in a world of “otherness” where identities are valued as good or bad, such as “the immigrants”, “the gays”, “men”, “women”, “old”, “young”, “Indian”, “Asian”, “Mexican”, and the list goes on and on. And these points of otherness, are points of difference and variety and culture and can be celebrated as joyful ways that God has created and crafted a world of diversity. The words are not inherently bad – it’s moreso what you think of the words when you hear them and the ways in which you evaluate them.

Something that I can share from my own experience, is that I remember growing up hearing the phrase, “that’s so gay” – as someone on the LGBTQ+ spectrum, I didn’t really know exactly what it was trying to communicate, I just knew it was a way to degrade whatever ‘that’ was. But as time and culture has changed, I’m glad to see what the word ‘gay’ means is changing. And we are now seeing this with the word ‘queer’ – while I don’t identify with the term, I have many friends who do identify as queer. Queer was a word that, by definition, meant ‘weird or strange’ and because people are uprooting the word and changing what it means, this identity of what queer means continues to shift every day. I also find that encouraging, to see people not settle for something that denies them their personhood, but they find power within to redefine what the world will call their identity.

But the hinge point that proverbs is getting to again is as simple and as difficult as it sounds – all of these identifiers, all of these people or groups…the Lord is the Lord of them All. It’s an adage you can’t shake, it’s a belief that is what it is, and it grounds us to our Creator God who calls us all beloved, even when we don’t see the belovedness in one another. And if this was the end of the sermon, that would be enough – because each day, every interaction, and in every relationship, we have the divine choice of whether or not we will see each other as equals. That is divine work, that is the work of a lifetime, and I empower you and empress upon you to seek to engage in that work, especially if it makes you uncomfortable or stretches your horizons.

1. Generosity

This next juncture of our Word is one that we’ve heard about

frequently in the last few weeks, so I won’t spend too much time here, but we do need to recognize that generosity is tied to Divine action. We are told that those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.

We hear about generosity as a core part of who God is, how God acts, and how we are called to act each day in our own lives. A life of generosity is not only one that tithes, but one that seeks to use talents for the enrichment of all, and seeks a spirit that looks generously upon others, even when that is difficult to do.

1. Justice

The Proverb is clear about justice – those who sow injustice will

reap calamity and the rod of anger will fall, which then leads us to understand that those who sow justice will reap joy. I heard a story this week that I would like to share with you, that speaks so poignantly to a quiet but powerful sense of God’s justice at work in the world.

There was a man named Abraham Johannes Muste who graduated from Union Seminary and he was inspired by the work of Christian mysticism in the Quaker tradition. After graduation, he became active in the civil rights world as a pacifist. After many years of this work, he saw our nation enter the Vietnam War. Because he was greatly revered after all of his social justice work, he was trusted by many groups in their efforts to end the war. In 1966 he led a group of pacifists to Saigon, but after demonstrating for peace, they were arrested and deported. The same year, he flew with some religious leaders to Hanoi where he met with Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese Communist leader. They were two older men in the midst of a war – one of them was committed to the path of violent change and the other was committed to nonviolence.

During the war, Muste stood many nights in Washington D.C. holding a candle in silent protest outside of the White House. When an incredulous reporter asked if he thought this would really change the U.S. policy on Vietnam, Muste had a beautiful, elegant response. He said, “Oh, I don’t do this to change the country. I do this so the country won’t change me.”

In the midst of war, in a place where he could have allowed his own heart to become violent, he was committed to the good work of ensure that he would not lose himself in the work of justice. What a beautiful sense of being grounded in the Word, working in the world, and seeking change and justice in a Divine way that again recognizes that sense that the Lord is the Lord of all.

1. Words of Wisdom

I hope that wherever you are on the path of growing into the

person God is calling you to be, that these words of wisdom on relational life, generous giving, and justice living will help guide you in the next steps. The work we do as followers of the Word shapes us and calls us to these actions every day, so let us together seek for these words to transform our lives that they are not obscure fact, but like adages, are everyday habitual reminders of who we are and who we wish to be. Amen.