July 7th , 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Ordinary Time

10:30 am

The Act of Peacemaking

I. What Stops our Language

This past week, I sat around the table with the Mission and Outreach committee, and I finally dared to bring up what had been on my heart for months: the refugee crisis and the reality of detention centers. I had to reconcile within myself what kept me so quiet for months, and maybe some of these reasons resonate with you:

I was fearful that I would be bringing a political topic into the pulpit – that I would be dividing a congregation into Democrats and Republicans and Independents, and so on. I was afraid that I was mixing church and state and how would people respond. I was fearful of getting some flack for that. But then I realized that my fear of other’s judgment became bigger than my call – and I had to shift.

I also had to recognize within myself that I felt what I think many people feel: hopeless. The situation is so big and vast and great, that how do I begin to piece together a meaningful message on the refugee crisis. I felt hopeless – what could we do? Here, in Maryland, here, at SPC?

Perhaps some of that hopelessness or fearfulness resonates with you as well, but much like life’s difficult topics: it’s better to talk about the elephant in the room than to pretend it doesn’t exist. It is better to acknowledge what is going on, than to pretend it isn’t there. And so today, today I call us to what the short clip called us to: peacemaking, a call to welcome, a call to hospitality, no matter what our political views are – because this is a crisis not only in a political nature, it is one of a human nature, one that intertwines all the beloved children of God.

II. The Message for Today

Today’s sermon is a little different than my usual tendency to dig deep into the context of the Scripture – though I encourage you to do that this week. Yet in some ways, the Scripture speaks for itself, it speaks the truth that we already know: we are to welcome the stranger and that one of the many ways we can show Christ’s love is through hospitality.

Because, you see, we’re all strangers, in a strange land. Delve into any part of our history and you can find it there. We just celebrated the 4th of July, where we, as immigrants, found this beautiful and abundant land, and made it home. Yet let us not forget, let us not be dismayed, it was not our land to begin with – we were immigrants, aliens, people of other nations who through battle and invasion took this land to be our own. And while we celebrate the fourth of July, we also recognize that this America is the great melting pot of cultures over generations.

You can see it in Biblical Scripture, whether you want to talk about the Exodus, which took up quite a bit of space in the Old Testament, or you want to talk about Jesus who had to flee to Nazareth because his life was in danger. If you want the Biblical context for immigration, you can find it in abundance.

III. The Arguments

There’s a reason there are detention centers though, we know that – we know that there are people, perhaps including ourselves, who say that this land is no longer open to immigration. Yet that’s riddled with issues and the list is long and lengthy, and rather than go into that debate, here’s what I’d rather propose:

No matter where you are on the spectrum of this issue, there are two things we should be able to agree about. The first is this, which is drilled into our very souls: we are all beloved children of God and I do not get to choose who is more worthy or less worthy. God love us all, and there’s no real way to get out of that. Even those who do not know God, are still loved by this God whose love is so great, so immense, so immeasurable, that we can barely comprehend it ourselves.

The second thing I think we can all agree on, is that because we are all beloved children of God, we all need safety. We need a toothbrush, we need some toothpaste, we need a bed to get rest, we need clothes to keep us warm, we need water to nourish our bodies. And the harsh reality is that those who are in detention centers, as well as other places in the world, deserve, simply by being God’s own, the right to safety. Safety is not a privilege, safety is inherent to who we are and whose we are called to be.

IV. The Video & Challenge

I shortened up the sermon today because I feel like the video really speaks for itself. We hear that welcome is in our faith DNA and that our lives are intertwined. So, Springfield, how shall we respond as the called people of God in this place and time?

I’ve printed out some information from the Presbyterian Disaster Relief Refugee Ministry in the Narthex, and I recommend you take a look at all the ways in which we can respond. Maybe it is in letters, or prayers, or notes to our administration, or visits to detention centers. We are called to give, act, and pray, and so there is no answer today – no answer on how we respond. But what we will do together, as a community of faith, is to begin to have the conversations. How do we respond? What should we do? Those conversations will begin in the fellowship hall, but will also continue in other listening sessions.

We have an opportunity to live out the love we have so freely received. Let us do so with integrity, action, compassion, and peace. Amen.