**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**June 19th, 2022**

**A Holy Nudge**

1. Divided Now United

The phrases we might be most drawn to are the ones we have

heard before in Galatians, where we are told there is no longer Jew nor Gentile or Male or Female. This is a beautiful statement on the diversity which we can find in many of the Epistles and we would be wise to take a closer look.

Often, I find myself thinking reading the commands of Scripture and acknowledging that this embracing this diversity is much easier said than done. When I read today’s Scripture, I feel the challenge. I heard a humorous quip from a friend who said, “Mr. Rogers did not adequately prepare me for the people in my neighborhood.” Whether that’s loving your neighbor, doing the work of justice, or laying down your wants for the needs of Christ’s church – they are all difficult but important ways of fulfilling the call of Christ.

I could fill this sermon in a negative frame with all the ways that we can find divisions among us. We would be bummed out and I would have to go into the afternoon and you wouldn’t be keen on coming back to church anytime soon. But in short, we know the divisions, right? Whether that’s ideology, cultural, or geographical – the divisions to name are many.

Some of those things that look like divisions can be celebrated because the word and division and diversity share a similar sensibility. Diversity or differing thought is not necessary a bad thing. How boring would this life be if we all just agreed on everything – sure, it might be easy at first, but it would quickly get boring and repetitive.

We need to do some nuancing here in the text. Diversity is not a problem, but division often can be. Here’s what I mean in simpler terms – being a Jewish person has a history and culture that is beautiful and there is much to celebrate. On the same hand, being a Gentile – or, non Jewish person – has other aspects to celebrate amid it’s large diversity of culture. Saying that they are the same isn’t a matter of taking away how important the culture is – it is saying that they are on par - they are equal to one another.

In the same regard, being a woman has wonderful aspects to it and we have a history all our own, and men in the same respect have a culture to celebrate too. We aren’t taking away the implicit value of each group – we are saying that one is not lesser than the other. In Christ, we are all important, we are all valuable and vital to this body and in our differences, we also claim God’s desire for equality.

I wish I could say the Galatians figured it out, or that we have – but this equality among diversity is something we’re always striving towards. As a community, we need to figure out how to do that and do it well.

1. Christ as law personified

Paul makes another bold statement in his letter to the Galatians

when he shares that we no longer need the law and that we no longer need a disciplinarian. We have Christ as the personification of the law and that is all we need to move ahead in our life together.

If that doesn’t make any of you anxious or itch, I’d have to ask why. It makes me uncomfortable at first and I’m not someone who is a law fanatic, but I do see the benefit of the Presbyterian ways of being decent and in order. When we have systems and rules to guide our way of life, we are able to live more peaceably – or, that is certainly the idea.

We also live in a country where we are told that the church and state are two different entities, but we often see overlap. There are some significant similarities of how the US Government operates on a national level and the Presbyterian Church form of government. We do not live in a Christian nation…and yet we do...and as Christians we need to continue to ask how we balance our own faith in this secularized nation and world.

Yet, Paul has an important point here that needs emphasizing – law is a human institution, but when we follow Christ, we follow a divine command. Now that we know Christ, we know what is right and we no longer, in theory, need the emphasis of law to guide us.

So how do we merge these ideas? How do we create spaces where Christ’s life is personified through the way we interact with one another in a lawful way? It is not an easy task, nor a small one, but it is certainly worth some thought and meditation.

III.

And all of this brings me to the emphasis of this letter, this sense that there is a Holy Nudge to face these hard questions head on. We need to ask these questions – how do we hold both diversity and equality as important aspects of our lives together? How do we follow the law but also follow what Christ calls us to do, which can sometimes confront the limits of the law?

I believe it starts with learning how to have healthy and difficult conversations. I found a quote on Facebook that I posted recently and it reads, “Being taught to avoid talking about politics and religion has led to a lack of understanding of politics and religion. What we should have been taught was how to have a civil conversation about a difficult topic.”

I’m not sure who wrote these lines, but I know they are wise. Every time I enter the pulpit, even in a safe space like this, I wonder how to bring issues, that may have a political background, into the forefront under a Christian lens. I’ve been told early in my ministry training, “Don’t bring politics in the pulpit.” The problem is…much of what Jesus did would be considered…political under our definition today.

We need to feel that holy nudge – the nudge to ask those questions that are difficult. We need to follow the guideline that the letter to the Ephesians spoke to last week – to speak the truth in love to one another. If we can’t have conversation, if we cannot respect each other and find a way to deeper understanding then…we aren’t going to get very far here. The life of faith is a life that is lived on the edge.

G.K. Chesterton wrote, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.” We walk into spaces with our own viewpoints and we walk on eggshells at times. The holy nudge is a brave nudge that demands difficult conversation – it is a nudge that says…

Maybe you are right, maybe you are wrong, or maybe you are neither and it’s simply a mystery to our human minds. It’s a nudge that reminds us that we have much more to learn and while that can be difficult to hear, it can also be an exciting invitation. The holy nudge might feel powerful enough to knock you right off your feet, but it is the important work for the people of God to do in order to sense God’s Kingdom in the here and now.

And may I be bold and perhaps self-indulgent, or self-indulgent for the benefit of Springfield…during our offertory, we are going to give you some extra time to fill out your time and talent worksheets. I hope you feel a holy nudge to a place where we might greatly need your help in order for us to be the body of Christ who continues to do important, challenging, and Christ-minded work in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead.

My friends, let the holy nudge guide you, to the ends of your understanding and to new heights. Let it make you ask difficult questions, like how we hold diversity and equality in the same hand. Let it lead you to following Christ to the extent that you fight for justice in new and bold ways. May you know as you are nudged this holy nudge, that the Holy Spirit is here to encourage, support, and nourish you as you become more deeply rooted as a disciple of Christ. Amen.