October 4th, 2020

Springfield Presbyterian Church

I’m Not Even Sure Anymore What Season We Are In.

The 208th Day of March

**Send Down an Olive Branch**

I. Bad Jokes

Before I can even begin the sermon, I have to tell you the ‘dad’ joke that is on my mind, otherwise I won’t be able to focus. So here it is, and I anticipate a loud muted groan on the other side of the zoom screens:

“Do you need an Ark? Don’t worry, I Noah guy.”

Get it? Noah. Noah builds the Ark.

Anyway, swiftly moving on.

II. A Flood of Monumental Proportions

Now we can get into the really tricky waters of the flood and the deep theological problem that rises to the surface. Something that has always made me uncomfortable about this story, is when God says that he hates what he has created and it’s just so awful that God needs to get rid of it all, except for Noah. It is also written so strongly, God hates what he has made, not – God wasn’t overly pleased or besmirched. It leaves me with two possible answers, at least in my mind: either God makes mistakes or we have free will.

 Either answer will find you in those flood waters again. Either the God that you know and love and has saved you, made a mistake. What would that mean for you and me and the world we live in? I prefer the second option, which is still challenging – we have free will.

 Free will is a wonderful gift, most of the time – it gives us flexibility in choosing both small and large decisions in our lives. And while some choices are simply out of our hands, I give thanks to God who gives me the freedom to pick what fits me best. I find that I am constantly making this choice as I practice art – and it is a practice – I choose colors, I choose ways of applying ink, I choose how to fold or mold or shape something. Sometimes the art is a complete and utter failure

 that goes straight into the trash, and sometimes it is a wonder and a joy and I look and hold it and give thanks for the capacity for those choices to align in beauty.

 We are in flooded times. Our social media is flooded, our news reports are flooded, to the point where if we do not release the pressure, we will continue to see the waters rise until you can’t see any ground anymore. The reason that I took this past week off was that I was starting to feel those flood water rise. I was overwhelmed by the claim of life this virus has had on our lives, the racial tensions that are inflamed, and by an election impending where I fear the division will drive even greater divisions. It’s also the end of the summer and the beginning of autumn, moving us to colder winds and beautiful colored leaves and hopefully some snow. Yet, admittedly, I am someone who struggles with seasonal depression, so I was and am grieving the loss of sunlight.

 I am profoundly glad for the capacity and for the privilege to have the free will choice to press the reset button on my soul. What a great gift and a great blessing from God and this community of faith. I also would recommend the reset to a friend - no matter how strong you perceive yourself to be or how lovingly-stubborn you might be in trying to push through – if you can take some time to take a break from the flood of this world – go for it. Take the grace, accept it, and know that you might not come back with a full fuel tank, but the flood waters will have certainly dissipated.

III. Finding Peace

 This past week, I felt like God sent down an olive branch, just like Noah received from the dove from the window. I felt like God had said, “Here’s my gift to you, simple and gentle, a sign of peace, a sign of provision.” What a glorious gift, the gift of peace.

 Right now, we live in a world where we are certainly in need of peace. I do not need to name all the places where humanity is struggling, for the list would overwhelm us. Often, so often, all of it feels out of our control, and perhaps some of it is, at least on the surface. I would encourage you and I to both dig deeper, because God has given us the gift of free will and somewhere, somehow, God can give us the gift of peace if we seek it out.

III. Peace and Global Witness

 It is Peace and Global Witness Sunday, a time where we look for that olive branch to be sent down upon us in a world of grief. The focus this year is under the theme of confronting homelessness and thwarting conflict. The offering this year affirms again and again the reality that is true and hard: the gift of God’s peace, of that single olive branch, is for everyone. That’s wonderful, except when that means peace is given to people who you are in conflict with, or folks who are making what we might think of as bad choices. Anne Lamott, a Christian writer, famously said, “You can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.” How beautiful, how challenging, how glorious is that to acknowledge.

 So, again, I pose the question, with the theme of these two weeks laid over it – how are you and I going to make some choices, to use that God given gift of free will and use it to promote peace? In some ways, this is a complex question, but in other ways, it’s quite easy. Sometimes it is the choice between offering a masked up smile to someone in the grocery store, or dropping off a note of encouragement at a door step, or you can pay for the next person’s coffee in line. When we affirm someone’s humanity, when we let them know even in the smallest of ways that they are important and treasured and wonderfully made, that is an act of God’s peace that you have lovingly given in the world.

 And yes, there is a call to go beyond small actions, but please do not discount them either. Do not think that your small work is not enough, it is – is more than enough, it is one more act of loving peace in a world that desperately needs it. To extend that peace further and perhaps bigger, we have some choices that we can make that create larger impacts. The most obvious big thought that comes to mind this month is – to vote. Voting is your free will choice to choose who you best think will be serving God’s Word and God’s creation in this country. After all you may have heard about voting this year, know that voting is no small act, it is an act of peace – peace wished for our nation and world, and peace of mind for ourselves.

 This week, if you feel like you are in the flood and that tidal water is rising, press reset. This is your official pastoral permission to go nap, drink tea, take a walk, or whatever you need to do to press that button. And may you also, as you see those flood waters go down a bit, may you choose to be part of that olive branch – may you choose to be a sign of peace in a weary world. Amen.