**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**October 2nd, 2022**

**Our Bigger Story**

1. **Introduction**

This week, we are into the fourth week of the series, “I’ve been meaning to ask…” which invites us to live in authentic curiosity with one another. In the last three weeks, just as a brief recap, we’ve been able to assert that we can celebrate both the diversity and differences among us, while also remembering that we are all called beloved by God. In our second week, we thought about those spaces where people aren’t often called beloved – the places that are hidden from view, those with a bad reputation – and how we, as the body of Christ, can continue to strive towards a kingdom of equality.

Last week, our question changed to, “Where does it hurt?” and we delved deeply into the personal stories we hold where hurt resides and the constant creation of a community that invites us to share those stories and for them to be validated and honored. This morning, we ask the same question, but on a grander scale, as we look at the larger systems and institutions that become part of our corporate and collective story. Let’s first reflect on the Word as we seek to understanding.

1. Systems of Healing

In our New Testament reading this morning, we hear two stories

– one of a woman seeking healing in the streets and one of a father seeking healing for his daughter who is presumed to be dead. Jesus is walking in the streets and there’s this woman, she hasn’t even been granted a name in the text, but as reader we can sense she’s on the outskirts of accepted society. She’s bleeding, and while the culture is shifting and changing, there’s still this sense of the old Hebrew law about being unclean and clean. If she’s bleeding – she’s unclean, she’s less, she isn’t pure, something is wrong with her.

 You can feel the shame that she carries and the shame that is then amplified by the crowd who seek her dismissal and ask Jesus not to bother when she simply touches the cloak of Jesus. Yet Jesus turns around, Jesus looks upon her with mercy, Jesus heals this woman not for the accolades of the crowd, but because she believed that healing was possible. The system judged her, yet our Savior broke the chains of society and counterculturally healed her.

 We also can look similarly at the story of the young girl presumed dead. God bless this father, Jairus, who asks Jesus to heal his daughter. The synagogue leader’s people, the holy people of the land, are basically telling this man not to bother Jesus. Why? Your daughter is already dead. Yet, Jesus chose to take a few of his disciples to the house and as the story shares, the daughter is healed.

1. Themes

I decided to share these stories in brevity because I see two

important themes resonating in both stories. Both Jarius and the woman on the street believed that they could be healed, despite any human of any level of prestige telling them otherwise – they saw Jesus as the ultimate healer. Systematically, I also see the theme of people who don’t want to ‘bother’ Jesus – people who are complacent with the way things are and perpetuate a society and a people who are shut off to the possibility of wonder, healing, and beauty.

1. Systems

As we consider the Word in the light of the world around us, I

have to ask the hard question…are we all that different from those dirt roads and people from the synagogue? Have we, as a society, continued to shut ourselves off to wonder? Have we pushed aside the Jarius’s and the women at the cloak, again, as a society, where we just ask them to not bother with healing?

We have, right? This is sadly a rhetorical question. These

questions aren’t meant to be damning to you or to me – they aren’t to place blame, but they are to ask the hard questions that may be able to give us a greater sense of how to move forward in a more positive way. Let’s also seek to remember that all systems are human, not divine, and that no system is perfect, no society has it all figured out.

Yet, you have to name the system, you have to name the issue

in order to seek healing, in order to find peace, in order for things to change. Last week, we saw that Hannah only found peace after she was able to tell her story. In the same way, when we are honest about the systems around us and challenge them, we are invited with a sense of curiosity in ways we can see real and palpable change.

V. Name the system

So, let me get out of ambiguity, let me name a few of the

systems. This could go poorly for me, but here we go…
 Speaking of health…the American health care system, by and large, is one that monetarily benefits from the suffering of humans. That’s not to say that it doesn’t have redeeming qualities, but we are focusing on the stories of hurt today. We see this clearly when those who are hurting cannot get the basic preventative health care they need to live a healthy life. We see this when medications like insulin for diabetes, a treatable disease, are so high that folks are reaching into the bottom of their pockets to get the medicine that they need.

And to add, let me be clear, I’ve lived out of the States with

universal health care and they have their own issues. The point is not to demonize, because there are so many layers to the hurt in one system alone, but to hear the stories of those being hurt in those systems and seek where we can be part of the healing.

One other example, because I’m not looking to point to one

system alone, - is going to bring us closer to home. Even as a pastor in the Presbyterian faith, I am able to concretely say that we do not have it figured all out. We have embedded systems where our way of government within the church can be helpful, but it can also limit us from embracing wonder and curiosity. We have also been guilty of injustices, and we’ve heard it right from our Baltimore-Dakota stories, where we do not pay or give pension to our pastors in native reservations. It’s ridiculous. We need to hear the stories in our congregations and in the system, to seek healing.

 And again, I’m not picking on Presbyterianism alone.

Yet, whatever denomination or faith tradition you look at, there’s hurt within the story. There’s a limitation to wonder, there’s been people who have left the church and many of us know those people, by the human actions of a human institution. Let’s make sure to hear their stories.

V. Where to go from here

 I realize that as I’ve named these systems, both in Scripture and in our lives, that these are stories that are hard to hear. No one wants to sit in the hurt, no one wants to dwell in these stories, but again and again, I will remind us, that in order to find peace and resolution, it’s these stories that will point us in the right direction.

 So where do we go from here? We listen to the stories of hurt, we recognize where we’ve been hurt in the system, and we name it. And then, when we are able, in conversation with God and with others, a beautiful act would be then to ask, “what next?” The pain is real and valid and now that it has been said, what do we do with that information? How do we create institutional change? How do we see healing and embrace wonder today?

 That’s your cliffhanger for next week, where we will ask – after all this, what do we need. Yet in the meantime, before next Sunday, I’d like for you to sit with those questions. Consider them, let them make you uncomfortable, and then start to carefully dip a toe into the wondering of what may come next. Amen.