**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**March 27th, 2022**

**The Door is Open**

**Lent IV**

1. Liturgy

Our liturgy this morning reminds me of those parents who

watch by the door, awaiting for their kid to enter the home before curfew. While I’m not a parent, I have been told that having a child is like having a part of your heart walking outside of your body – it may not make sense to those who are not parents, but there’s something innate about protecting your children.

 I thought back to my teenage years and I now know as an adult that my parents were playing it cool. You see, I was an independent girl, I didn’t want my parents waiting up for me, I wanted to be a grown up. To be honest, now that I am a grown up, I wish I could go back and be a kid, but that’s another sermon entirely.

 So, my parents were clever. They left the porch light on and I knew when I came home to turn it off. They would be in their bedroom watching TV and I would slowly move up the stairs to my bedroom across the hall. When I got to my door, their TV would go off and it fell silent. I didn’t know it then, but I know it now, they had outsmarted me and waited for me to come home.

 While I was a sassy teen, I may have not appreciated it, as an adult, I certainly do. There’s a comfort in knowing that the door was open, the porch light was on, to know that someone was waiting because they loved you so much, and there was nothing I could do or say that would take away that love they had for me.

 We all have grown up in different times and different societal expectations. Regardless, I hope someone was at the door for you, whether or not you liked it at the moment, because it reminds us that we belong. If you didn’t have it at home, I hope you feel it in this place, no matter what happens, no matter what you do, the door to the sanctuary is open, the light is on, you are welcome here. I hope you’ll always feel welcome to come on home.

1. The Father

In our text today, the Father is the representation of God –

the one who looks at his younger child who squandered his spending money and comes with remorse to find a home with his family again. The son is scared, the son is asking for forgiveness, he longs to come home once again, even though he might never believe he deserves it.

 And there’s the father, unquestionably joyful at seeing his son and hearing his son’s apology. His father pours out grace instead of punishment – the door is open, the feast will be prepared, and he’s welcomed home with a loving mercy that many of us find hard to comprehend, but we gratefully accept.

 I’ve brought this up often of late, but there’s something crucial about this exchange – there is repentance and forgiveness. When the son comes and admits his fault, the father forgives – the same is true for our Heavenly Father, for when we come and admit our sin, we find a forgiveness so full and hopeful that we can begin again. This parable gives us another example of the power of confession and pardon.

1. The Great Curfew Keeper

As we consider the father to be a sign of our Father God, I

found that I had a new name for God – the Great Curfew Keeper. It doesn’t roll off the tongue so nicely like Redeemer, Wonderful Counselor, or Great I Am, but the Great Curfew Keeper is one that stands at the doorway.

 If we, as humans, can imagine again that having a child is like your heart running around outside your body, can you even begin to consider the relationship God has with God’s children? All of his Spirit is running around this world and while that overwhelms our human minds, somehow the God of all can be present to each and every one of us. He stands at the door, not to punish for curfew, but to check in like a loving parent, “Are you safe? Did you have a good day? How are you feeling? Would you sit down and talk to me?”

 The invitation is there, friends. I recently had someone of great faith call me and I didn’t know him – sometimes I just get a call from someone who is spiritually hurting and needs a pastor’s words. He told me that he didn’t believe God cared for him anymore, that he didn’t matter, that God would never forgive him.

 We had a lot to unpack on that phone call, but I remember saying to him, “You know the Scriptures – we are promised that he cares for the sparrow, a small tiny bird, how much greater does he care for you and me?” And he knew, he knew these words already, but he needed to hear them again.

 The reason I share this phone call with you is to say that I believe we all, to some extent, have the same thoughts that this man was struggling with – does God love me? Does God care for me? What if I’ve just messed up too many times? And so here, today, I’m here to remind you of the Great Curfew Keeper, the God who stands at the door no matter what our stories look like and continues to invite us in and keep the porch light on.

1. How will you respond

I haven’t touched upon the reaction of the older son and he’s

certainly important, but he hasn’t come to this message today. What I really want to leave with you is the sense that God has an invitation, he has forgiven the moment we repent, and he’s ready for conversation. Are you ready?

 Often, folks will tell me that they find it hard – they might say, “God’s invited me but…where do I even begin?” I would say, you begin where you want to begin and fortunately there’s numerous ways to get there for all of us with our different ways of operating in the world. For some, it’s a matter of opening up a devotional, others will use a journal or sketchbook to write or draw, or if you are like me, you just start talking.

 I’m glad there isn’t a camera in the manse because you would see your pastor looking at the ceiling and talking out loud. I can affirm that I try to make my prayers here in this sanctuary ones that are eloquent, but when it’s God and me, one-on-one, it’s just pure free thought. If you listened, you would hear, “God…I don’t even know…I feel lost about this and I don’t know how we even got here. I know I shouldn’t ask you to fix it, but, can you fix it? Also, thank you for all the good stuff too.” I mean, it’s nothing particularly theologically astute, but it’s like God and I just have random conversations, day in and day out, and it’s a steady stream of thought. All I’m saying is, you can get fancy about the invitation if you want, but you can also do whatever feels right. There’s no shame here.

 However it happens, I hope you respond to the invitation. I hope you sit on the porch swing and know that you are loved beyond measure by a God that continues to say to you, “The door is wide open, come on in, I’m so glad to see you.” Amen.