March 29th, 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

5th Sunday of Lent

10:30am

Wilderness of Coronavirus – Virtual Church – Week Two

Springing into Light

A Reflection on Ephesians 5:8-14

1. Electrical Outage

When I woke up on Saturday morning, I awoke to the loud sounds of thunder crashing that it felt so close. All the sudden, any electronic device turned off and the darkness was real. In a world where you can feel helpless as you sit at home, one of the last things you need is for the electricity to go out, even if it is briefly. When the writer of Ephesians says, “Sleeper, awake!” – I assure you, that morning, I woke up startled in the dark.

And so I did, I awoke, I had my cup of tea and I sat before the passage that we hear today. As we take a closer look at the passage, we see again the dynamic of ‘dark and light’ – which seems to be sown like a thread throughout the entire Bible. From the very days of Genesis where God brought light into the world, to the words of the prophets, from our Gospel lessons – we again today find ourselves with light and dark in the letter to the Ephesians. The metaphor is mostly consistent – the darkness is where evil dwells, where bad things happen, where secrets are kept. The light is where things bloom, where things are good and right and true, and as we know Christ, we see Christ as the light of the world – the light, the renewal of all humankind.

And it stands true for us today, for the most part – we see more crimes happen under the cover of night, we can’t see in the dark, so it feels clouded in mystery. As I think about my childhood, maybe you do too - I have that image of being around a campfire where you hold the flashlight underneath your chin as you tell a scary story to your fellow campers. The light shines upon your face as you tell the tale, while the story fades into the dark.

Now, I would love to say that the same stands true for the light today – that everything in the light is true and good and pure and wonderful. Yet, some darkness happens even when the sunshine dwells in our skies. When things are revealed, when things are brought into the light – we have clarity, we can discern, we can discover more about who we are and who we are called to be. Yet, the light is sometimes scary too – who wants their deepest secrets revealed? And even in the light, we still see a world where things aren’t necessarily easy, especially these days.

Part of the call in this passage is one that also reverberates in other passages – where dark is evil, dark is to be exposed, evil is to be brought to justice and light is meant to prevail. Yet, right here, in this Lenten experience, in our own wilderness of staying indoors, how do we live out such a call?

1. Mission and Outreach

If you have the answer that question, you are further along in the discernment journey than I am. But, as I met with Congregational Care and Mission and Outreach committees this week, we kept asking this important question – how do you bring light when there is so much dark? How do you do something impactful while remaining indoors? We spoke last week about using cards to express our gratitude to bring some light and life to those who are serving in such a nebulous time.

Yet we continue to ask this question. I promise you, there is no guidance in the Presbyterian Book of Order on proper actions during a pandemic. The truth is – we really are all making this up as we go. And, rather than telling you as a leader that we have it all figured out, all is good, all is well, no worries – I would be lying to you. One of the punchlines I say to Donna often in the office is, “I don’t know, I just work here.” – or another translation of what I mean, “I don’t know, I’m just following the Holy Spirit and acknowledge that I’m doing my best to follow the call.” Yet the first punchline is way more swift.

As we join together for virtual worship, I don’t know what we are doing – but I know it’s important. In the days and weeks to come, the best way I can be a leader to you is to say, “I don’t know, but let’s do this together. It might be dark right now, but lets figure out how to live in the light. Let’s get through this and know we aren’t alone.” The darkness of our realities are settling in, but as a community of Christ – we continue to point to the directive of this Lenten time. Yes, we are in Lent, yes, it is dark, yes, we are waiting in the wilderness – but the truth of the matter is that the light always comes. Maybe Easter isn’t on April 12th, maybe it’s the first time we are together in this building. Maybe the light takes longer to see this year, but maybe we appreciate the light and love and hugs we share in a different way. Maybe this darkness is going to change us, and if we let it, maybe as a society, it can change us for the better.

1. The Light of Christ is coming

The light of Christ is coming, it’s just not under our usual calendar dates. But we know, we know through Scripture, we know throughout the test of time and historical narratives that even in pain and struggle and heartache, somehow the light always pierces through. From the beginning in Genesis to our lives today. So, if there’s anything I need you to hold onto, even if that’s very difficult – is that the darkness is not forever. We can acknowledge that it’s hard, and challenging, and scary – but at the same time, I need you to light the candle and to remember that light has, and does, and will always break through. Christ will be resurrected, Christ’s light will come, this year is different from any that we’ve experienced – but my friends, the Word promises us from the very beginning that our waiting will end, even if we do not know when.

1. Finding Light

One of my pastor friends posted on their facebook, “This is the Lentist Lent I ever Lented.” I would agree – this is a wilderness that we are living out, rather than living through the text alone. But there’s good news here, also shared by another one of my friends and a good reminder to us. As we live in the wilderness, maybe we can hold onto this poem by Laura Fanucci, “When this is over, may we never again take for granted a handshake with a stranger, full shelves at the store, conversations with neighbors, a crowded theatre, Friday night out, the taste of communion, a routine checkup, the school rush ever morning, coffee with a friend, the stadium roaring, each deep breath, a boring Tuesday, life itself. When this ends, may we find that we have become more like the people we wanted to be, we were called to be, we hoped to be, and may we stay that way – better for each other because of the worst.”

So let us take this time of wilderness and go outside, look at the flowers springing up from the ground and let us remember that just as they rise up, we shall too. Let us do the important work of self-discovery, of helping one another, reaching out to the stranger in new ways, and knowing that the light is coming, even if we do not know when. Know that love will surround you, God’s grace will abide for you, the Spirit will lift you up, and Christ’s light will shine upon us once again. Amen.