August 30th, 2020

Springfield Presbyterian Church

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

The 173rd Day of March

**The Keys to the Kingdom**

I. A Moment of Change

 It was May of 2016 and it is a day I remember very clearly; it was the day in which you voted for me to become your pastor. As I was standing on the steps up front, Sharon came alongside me and handed me the keys to the church in front of all of you. It was no small gesture, nor was it a small statement, it was a profound moment where you said, as the family of SPC that you entrusted me to lead and guide this congregation.

 I had many emotions travelling through my body in that sacred moment – a deep sense of humility and honor, a scared sense that I would break the printer in my first week, the weight and power of responsibility and the sacred gentleness that is held delicately. While the emotions do not run as high every time I open the sanctuary door, I do look at my keys and feel a sense of belonging and honor, one that I do not take for granted.

 As the keys were transferred to my hand that Sunday morning of 2016, my name did not officially change until ordination, but I started to hear some of you refer to me as ‘Pastor Becca.’ In a moment, my name also changed, as the title and responsibility was handed over. I cannot nor do I ever want to forget the power of that May and how deeply it changed me and changed our community together.

II. The Car Keys

 I imagine that you have all felt this feeling to some extent when you’ve had major changes in your life. When you bought your first car and those keys were put in your hands – it’s awesome, but it’s also an awesome responsibility. You are not only responsible for yourself, but for your passengers, and for following the rules of the road.

 Or maybe you had this feeling when you bought your first house. I remember that day too – something is your very own and you can paint the walls and call it home. Now you are the ‘home owner’ and your title has changed. But again, what a great responsibility to be holding those keys, because all of a sudden no one is there to save the day if an appliance breaks – it’s up to you. With keys comes honor, joy, but also responsibility.

III. The Keys to the Kingdom

 So, if I felt the weight of those church keys in my hand or those car keys or those house keys, can you imagine the weight of the metaphor where Jesus the Messiah is handing over the keys of the Kingdom to Simon Peter? And in that moment, Simon Peter’s name changes to Peter, his responsibilities and view in the world is ultimately shifted.

 In that moment, Jesus gives Peter the keys and tells him to build up the very Kingdom of God and the church from a firm foundation. No pressure, Peter, no pressure at all.

 Peter is a fascinating choice because Peter is not the beloved disciple. He may have recognized that Jesus is the Messiah but Peter’s enthusiasm sometimes got him in trouble. Let’s remember some of the antics of Peter. Peter, reasonably, could not comprehend his Messiah dying and rising from the dead or anyone giving him a hard time and Peter is outraged. Jesus looks at him and says, “Get behind me, Satan!” Now, let me point out that there are five verses between Jesus giving the keys to Peter and then Peter being called Satan.

And later on down the road, Peter denies Jesus three times, and then has to sit in the corner with the enormity of guilt over his shoulder.

 Now, this morning isn’t to have a pick-on Peter party, but really it is important to set into context who Jesus handed the keys to the Kingdom to on that day. Why did Jesus choose Peter, other than Peter’s knowing that he was the Savior? Why didn’t Jesus go for a safe bet, the beloved disciple, or one of the more quiet and thoughtful disciples?

 It’s all conjecture, but I like to think that Jesus chooses to put into the leadership those who do not have it all together – not even a little bit. It’s written all over our Scripture texts. Moses, the stutterer, who pled with God not to have to speak to the people, but Moses was the chosen one. I think about Jonah, whose running away from God’s call ended up with him in the belly of a whale. I think about Paul, formerly known as Saul, who was a bunch of trouble before he got himself

together. I think about Elijah who had a breakdown and God had to intervene and tell him to take a walk, literally, to recenter himself.

 The good news, if not the great news is – we are reminded over and over again in Scripture that failure is not fatal. Failure, mistakes, and errors in leadership are part of what it means to be human and it is only in failing that we can become stronger. If we lead a life afraid of the calling, of never failing – we would not have much to say at the end of our days. Failure is a part of life and God knows and expects that and it does not preclude us from ministry – if anything, it’s an endorsement.

 Now, just to throw a disclaimer out there – this is not your pastor recommending that you go out and go completely wild here. Let’s go back to that metaphor of the keys – you wouldn’t get into your beautiful and stunning car and go onto route 97 and drive 100 mph and hope for the best. The keys are wonderful, joyous, but a responsibility. And so is our Christian life.

IV. This Daring Christian Life

 But my other disclaimer would seemingly demean my first disclaimer – this pastor does recommend that you try and dare and enter challenges and even if you fail, you know that you have a God and a community that will pick you up, dust you off, and you will start again. When you feel a nudge to do something, maybe that isn’t indigestion, maybe it’s the Spirit calling you to something daring and beyond your comfort zone.

 The reality is, while Peter officially received the keys to the Kingdom, each and every one of us receives the call and the keys to build up the church. In the Reformed tradition, which is Presbyterian at heart, we say that we are always reforming, always changing and transforming to the call of the Spirit in our world and the ways in which God operates in our lives. We also believe that while some are called to ordained ministry, that all are ministers – you and you and you, etc. You and I have the great honor and responsibility to step into the wonder of that reforming – to do the very work of refocusing and relearning.

V. At a Moment

 At this moment, we are living in tough times but also times of great change and questioning. We are learning again and again, every week and every day, how to be a church again. Today, I virtually hand you the keys – we are all in this together – how will we build up the church and the love of Christ in these days?

 May you go as a minister in this world, called to your own ministry and vocation, so with the keys in your grasp, go and dream and act to build up God’s Kingdom. Amen.