August 25th– 9:30am

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Who Will You Serve?

I. The Power of Memory

This past week, I was doing one of my usual tasks, actually, a favourite task – I was mowing the lawn. The weather was nice, not too hot, nor too cold, and I’m pushing the mower up and down the wee hill. And, as I’m mowing, all things are starting to run through my brain, which isn’t an unusual event. I wouldn’t say they were philosophical or deep thoughts either – things like, ‘What do we do about dinner tonight? I wonder how my friend up in Philly is doing – I really need to reach out to her. Now, what do I need to get done this week before meetings, and that DIY list is getting a little long.’ Right? Not major thoughts, but I wasn’t present: I didn’t look around me and appreciate the green of the grass, I didn’t take in the blue of the sky, I didn’t look up to the trees to appreciate the shade. I was, as I often say, ‘All up in my head’ about things that mattered, but it really wasn’t important in that very moment. I missed an opportunity to enjoy.

And then, the lawnmower ran out of petrol, and I’m walking towards the door to go back inside and, without a doubt, as prominent as could be, was a dragonfly. It wasn’t afraid of me, it wasn’t going to move – at least until I recognized it was there.

The dragonfly was important, because it evoked a memory. You see, about three years ago, the Rev. Louise Duncan, who helped me with my master’s dissertation and was also a good friend to many of our friends, died at the age of 41 due to a rare bone cancer. The news was swift – she went from being a marathon running woman with zest and energy with a quick decline. There’s a song, called ‘Dragonflies’ by Scottish singer Eddi Reader, and Louise identified and loved that song. And one of the lyrics, so gentle, says, ‘As soon as we’re here, we disappear, like dragonflies.’ So, when she died, there was a dragonfly sculpture in her memorial garden. And every time, whether that’s in a store or outside in this world, I always stop at the sight of the dragonfly. I remember, I smile, I laugh, I think, ‘Louise, you have a funny way of showing up at the right time.’

II. Memories and Experience

And while it’s a sad memory, on one hand, it’s also a memory that causes me to stop and wonder and breathe a little deeper. We’ve talked about memories here at SPC before, but the importance of memories bears repeating. We are a collection of souls and bones and muscles and tissues, but the real things that make us into who we are – the things that make me Becca, the things that make you – you – a lot of it comes down to our experiences and memories.

The importance of memory isn’t a new phenomenon. We see it in the Book of Joshua today, where Joshua brings all 12 tribes together to a city of refuge called ‘Shechem.’ It’s a safe territory for them all to gather. And Joshua calls to the people, he preaches the Word – he tells the people to remember God’s movement in their lives. He points them to the exile and exodus of Egypt, the safety and protection that God offered along the way, and has been faithful to us. Joshua calls upon the people to remember the covenant, the God who has not let go of them, even in the midst of darkness and even in the brightness of light. He urges them – remember. Remember. Remember.

And the message remains the same for us, here in this time and place in 2018. Remember. Remember God’s faithfulness. Remember the ways in which God has journeyed with your ancestors and with you. Remember those moments that stop you right in your tracks, whether that’s a rainbow in the sky, a dragonfly on the concrete, or the ebb and flow of the ocean. Whatever evokes memory, whatever it is that brings you back to that safe place of covenant and promise and protection, do not lose sight of it. In the past days, they have crafted who you are, and in the present day, they keep you grounded when we live in a world that is disjointed.

III. The gods of our ancestors

Why is memory Joshua’s parting message, his big sermon to these twelve tribes? It’s because there are temptations at the helm. The temptation that Joshua is pointing to is the god of their ancestors. He asks them to put away those gods. These gods were convenient gods, located in one place and stuck in their own geography. The people would offer theses gods their burnt offerings and thought – if I do this, this god of my ancestor will do that for me. It was a very this-for-that relationship. But Joshua again, says, ‘remember, remember’ – the God who has been with you through every place and time, our ups and our downs, our God who is with us now and will forever be with us – do not forsake our God.

IV. Who Are Our gods

A natural response to this passage is, ‘I’m good, I’m not worshipping the gods of my ancestors.’ And, yes. You’re right. But, in our age, in our time and place, what are the gods of this world that we worship? What are the temptations that we find so easy to fall into? Is it the desire for wealth?

Who is our leader? Is it Trump? Is it any political figure head? Is it the wise scholars of academia? Is it a notion or idea? What is it a laundry list of things to do that keep you up at night? What is the god in your life that is preventing you and me from seeing the covenant of our true God working and alive in this world?

V. Sermonic Calling

And so, like any good sermon, Joshua calls the people to act on the covenant, to act on their memories, and dedicate their lives to God. It’s been domesticated, but a phrase oft heard, sometimes on stickers or handcrafted cross-stitch, saying ‘as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.’ But Joshua is putting these words in much bigger letters, a neon sign if you will, there’s a life and an urgency to this call.

Today, what are you going to do? All we know, all we have is today, with no promise of tomorrow. So, what are you going to do? Are you going to live a life worthy of the calling? Are you going to use your wisdom that God has given and gifted you? Are you going to follow the status quo or are you going to choose to do something different?

That’s not a choice I’m to make for you. It’s a choice that you make for yourself. Something I hold close to my heart is a part of the Westminster Confession of Faith – which confirms that says, ‘God alone is the Lord of all the conscience.’ I can preach as many sermons as you like, I can offer you memories, and I can ask you to affirm your faith to what I understand to be the one true God – but it doesn’t mean much to me if it doesn’t come from your heart. I’m not a puppeteer.

So, I ask, alike Joshua, ‘who, this day, will you serve?’ Recount your memories, recount the covenant promises that God has made in your life, remember, my friends, remember. And then, in your own soul, with your whole heart, join me in confessing our faith together.

As I close this sermon, we will say the words of the ‘Brief Statement of Faith of the PC(USA).’ If it’s in your heart, if you choose today or reaffirm your calling to serve God, may those words spill out from your heart and join the chorus of voices in this congregation. If you aren’t there yet, that’s okay too, genuinely. For when we speak these words, for when we affirm our faith, may we take the call seriously, may we not say these words with a light heart but let them flow throughout you.

Today, I reaffirm my faith, I affirm that God makes his presence known in promises and memories, from dragonflies to ocean tides, to conversations that open my eyes in ways I cannot give adequate describe. I affirm that I see God moving and acting, even when it’s hard. And I affirm that today, for me and my soul, or my household, I will serve the Lord.

I affirm these things, out of my own heart, not from undue pressure, but because I know them to be true. If you feel the call on your heart, I ask that you join me in saying this affirmation of the faith together, found in your bulletin...