Springfield Presbyterian Church

January 24th, 2021

Third Sunday After Epiphany

To Change Your Mind

1. No Easy Topic

I was hesitant to preach upon this topic, because these four

words at the end of our reading from Jonah today – God changed his mind – is probably better suited for a Bible study, or roundtable discussion, or a philosophy or religion classroom. But right now, in the world of COVID, we don’t have those standard options, and God’s Spirit pushed me to preach upon four complicated words.

We see these four words – God changed his mind – not only in our reading today, but in readings from Exodus and 1 Samuel. My basic reaction to the reading is one of dismay – how could God, who is always the same, ever present, and knows what’s going to happen next – how could he change his mind? Maybe it’s all lost in translation – maybe those writers of old, maybe all these years has muddled the meaning.

And ultimately – it’s possible, it’s possible that moving from Biblical Hebrew, to Latin, to English – there might be something lost in translation. Or…maybe…something way more interesting is happening here.

What if, in our free will, what if we are co-partners in Creation with God? Yes, God rules above us all, no doubt, but what if those four words signal to a much cooler truth – creation is playing out right now and we are part of it and God and God’s people are journeying together to craft the Kingdom. What if there’s more freedom in our relationship with God than we’ve considered before?

It makes prayer more interesting, because while I’m praying, I’m not seeking to change God’s mind, but I am seeking to reach out and be led by the Spirit to see what God is calling me to do in challenging circumstances. It makes our lives more interesting – because all of a sudden we are partnering with God in new ways, and situations we might have considered impossible before come to light.

1. Enough with the Academics

Now, you might be thinking – enough with the academics.

We are Presbyterians, so we are beloved nerds, but you might wonder fairly – Okay, Pastor Becca, neato philosophy cliff-notes lesson, but what does it mean to me right here, right now?

Good question. For me, I like to think that my God is a God of second chances (and third chances, and fourth chances, and so on). While God could smite me and would have every reason to for sins I’ve committed, God’s grace and mercy always come to the forefront. One of my favorite quotes about church is, “The church is not a museum for the saints, but a hospital for the sinners.” I don’t come to this building to revel in my good deeds or claim ownership of them as if I existed in this world alone. No, I come to this building as a sinner, in search of the grace and peace and mercy that I know God provides – that grace and mercy where his love is so abundant that he changes his mind, that he chooses love above punishment.

This joyful grace makes me think about the power of prayer in a different way. When we come together later on in the service, we will share the pastoral prayer where we lift up our joys and concerns as a faithful community in Christ. Take a moment and think about what we are doing in that moment – are we laying our burdens down, yes – are we sharing with our community the joys and troubles of our hearts, yes – but do we believe that when we pray, that God can or will change circumstances?

I have to believe that is somewhat true. I have to believe that God and I are companions in a journey in this life of faith. I know that my prayers might not be answered in the way I envision them, but I must believe that God is on the other side of that holy phone call, listening carefully, guiding me by His Spirit, and calling me back again and again to prayer. I believe that I can’t necessarily change God’s mind, but God changes my mindset and how I interpret situations and dilemmas that I come upon in this life. And profoundly, I have to believe that God hears me and that I hear Him – that we are in relationship together, creating and crafting his will in this world together.

1. What about you?

My questions for you this morning are perhaps more complicated than Sunday’s past, but they are important questions as we grow in our life of faith together.

So, here is what I ask you:

When you go to prayer, what do you think is happening there? What does it mean for you and what leads you to prayer?

Another question – can and does God change his mind? Have you seen it in your own life? Have you seen it in the lives of others?

And finally, as you think about the aforementioned questions – what do you take away? How does it shape your faith life?

Easy questions, right? No problem. I’m going to post these questions in one of our e-mail circulation posts so you have the questions to meditate right before you. And what I would also encourage you to do is reach out – reach out to those in the community, reach out to me, to delve deeper, because these questions might lead you to a whole different arena of exploration.

I’m keeping this sermon short and sweet, because the questions are heavy and the answers may again lead us to further questions. But as you dig deep, as you start to integrate your faith in new ways, may you dare to ask difficult questions and perhaps learn to live with the unanswered mysteries. And may you be blessed by the knowledge that God is with you in this exploration and deepening of your faith, loving you and calling you by the Holy Spirit to a greater understanding of who and whose we are. Amen.