**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**August 8th, 2021**

**All For One**

1. Moving

This past week, my muscles have been busy lifting boxes and

finding new places for old things as I move up to Parkton to be with my soon-to-be-husband. As I’ve been cleaning, I am more aware of things that I just took for granted or overlooked because it faded into the background. One of these things is a quote that I wrote down, probably around two years ago, on my chalkboard wall in the kitchen, with a quote from Islamic poet Rumi. It reads, “Set your life on fire, seek those who fan the flames.”

 Initially, that might sound like a selfish idea – as if Rumi’s only thought was to benefit the self, but I read it as much more – I read it as a statement of community. When I come to Springfield, I have certain gifts and abilities, and together, through hard work and conversation, those skills become refined. In the same way, as you come here this morning, each of you have particular gifts that we are blessed to receive, and in working together, those gifts are strengthened for the work of God out into the world. In other words – and I know this hurts every introverted heart alike mine – but for better or for worse, we were never meant to be entirely alone – we are equipped and strengthened for ministry in relationship with God and relationship with one another. Rev. G. Porter Turner sums this idea up well in contemporary language, “I can become my true self only in relation to you.”

1. Room to Grow

And the reality is, we all have room to grow. That is both good

news and hard news to accept, but the Scriptures are keen to point this out. Paul, who is in prison in Rome, writes to the Ephesians to help them grow into a stronger body of Christ together. In this passage of the letter, the three themes that have risen to the surface for me are unity, equipping, and honoring the gifts of the body of Christ. Let’s dig in a little bit deeper to those three themes.

1. Unity

I feel like I talk about unity often, perhaps too often, but it isn’t

because I want to frustrate you or me by continuing to tune into the disunity we find in our nation and our world. But I can’t ignore it either and it is clear in this letter that unity is a crucial part of growth. For Paul, unity means that we aren’t be thrown back and forth by trickery, gossip, or scheming – frankly, those things are a waste of time, but are also hurtful and unhelpful as we seek to grow into the body of Christ.

 I love when Paul writes, ‘Speak the truth in love’ – Paul isn’t asking us into blind unity, where we all agree with one another and pretend that everything is okay. Paul is calling us into a life of authenticity, where hard words are said and difficult conversations take place – not for the goal of putting down, but rather, for the love of building up the body of Christ. The trouble might be is that everyone’s particular truth might be different. Let’s take something totally innocuous.

 For instance, as a native Jersian, I would tell you that the ultimate truth is that the Everything Bagel sourced from New York City or New Jersey is the ultimate bagel of all time. You might say to me, au contraire, the bagels in Montreal, which are boiled in honey water and made in a wood smoker is the ultimate bagel of all time and that is the truth. Now, I’ve never had a bagel from Montreal, but I would still claim my truth to be the right truth – because it is what I know, it’s a truth that I grew up with, and this is how we develop the truths that we exist in. Yet…would my truth change if my experience was different?

 Now, a bagel might be silly – I mean, but you as a native Marylander might have some strong views on crabs. Again, all innocuous, here in this place – those truths don’t matter so much. But it’s when we get into the tough stuff of life where truth can become rigid and difficult that’s where we see hatred and division boiling over. The beauty is though, that in the body of Christ, you are invited to have a difference of opinion. But Paul, and I, beg you and plead with you, that when you express your truth, your values, your opinions or more, that you do that in love. Not a fake love, not one that belittles or demeans, but an honest love where everyone is heard. The way through, the way to unity, the way to forgiveness and understanding all comes from the heart of who Christ is, the very personification of love.

1. Equipping

Now, when I think about our next topic, the idea of equipping the

saints, I found out something particularly nerdy, which of course thrilled me. The word ‘equip’ comes from the Greek noun *katar-tis-mos* which means, “the setting of a bone.” I’ve never had a bone reset, but I’ve heard bones reset in the hospital setting and what I can say is…it doesn’t sound so lovely. I think we often think about this idea of equipping as gaining information and education, but it isn’t what I would automatically call, ‘painful.’

But it is interesting to consider this idea of equipping the saints as setting the mind and heart to align with God’s intentions. When I think of the idea of equipping as a need to prepare by learning some humility, or by stretching myself beyond the point of flexibility, or reconciling with others. When I look at it in that light, maybe equipping is painful. Maybe we say we are equipped or want to be better equipped, but I wonder, in the ways we need to grow and shift to be equipped…are we sincerely ready to sign up?

Paul, as he sits in his prison, has had to align himself with the will of God in ways that he probably wasn’t excited about, especially as he sits in a damp cell. But he does it anyway. And he calls us to become equipped – it will be wonderful, it will be hard, it may bring us joy, and it may not – but the call to become equipped isn’t a question for Paul or for the church, it is a way of life that means we are truly following God’s intentions.

1. Diversity of Call

Paul also speaks about the diversity of gifts in the body of Christ,

some are going to be prophets, some apostles, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. In contemporary language, it means that some of us will be strong financial minds, some will be have the heart to minister to children, some will be encouragers in their local communities, some will minister in global contexts, some will be creative thinkers and artists, some will be active readers and learners, some will be able to sing songs that touch the soul, some will have a way and wit with words, and others will be able to interpret and communicate in different languages. All are not only valuable, but vital, to the work of God in this church and in the world, and the diversity is a gift as we seek to serve God together.

 I’ve heard from several people at different points in my ministry, that they feel like they don’t have a gift or a role in the community – to which I say, you do, you just can’t see it. Sometimes we don’t know our greatest gifts that we can offer to the body, and sometimes it takes someone else to let us know what gifts they have seen within us. Each and every one of you is a gift, with skills and talents to bring joy unto God and to God’s people.

1. Conclusion

This week, I encourage you to think more upon these topics of

unity, equipping, and diversity. Where are the places you are called to speak the truth in love and where are the places that you need to hear the truth in love so that we can be better unified? Where in your life do you need to be better equipped and what does that look like for you? Where do you see your gifts working in this congregation and beyond and can you encourage another by blessing them with affirming their gifts?

 In all we do, in all we say, in all we seek in this world, may we seek to build up the body of Christ in new and beautiful ways. Amen.