**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**November 28th, 2021**

**Homesick**

1. Where is Home?

This morning’s text from our Gospel lesson is referred to as the ‘little apocalypse’ in a variety of texts, due to its strong imagery of an impending future where change is at the forefront. The language, frankly, can be frightening, this sense of darkness and anxiety and fear embody the text, but it points us to another time, a brighter future, a time when all things will pass away and God’s Kingdom will reign in ways we cannot begin to imagine.

 Our theme this morning is ‘homesick’ – this sense that this world we live in, which can again be one of darkness, anxiety, and fear, is not our final home – but especially in these Advent times, we look toward a future and a longing of a home to come. We are homesick, homesick for something different, and this morning, I ask you – what are you homesick for?

 I think the first question though we need to reckon with though is – what does home look like for you? That might not be the home you grew up in, but if you could re-invent home, if you could dream up what home might look like in the idealistic sense, what would it look like? For me, there’s the basic hopes of home – where the kettle is always on, there’s chocolate in the pantry, there’s a warm hearth on cold days and the smell of an ocean breeze on the hot days of summer. Even deeper than that though is a sense of home where all are welcome, where pandemic and health concerns are no more, where no dream is too big to dream, and every heart is content. What does home look like for you? When you hear the word, home, what emotions and memories does it evoke?

1. Vilmarie

I would like to share with you a beautiful story that our former Co-Moderator of the

Presbyterian Church (USA), Vilmarie, has shared about this text, as well as her experience of home. May these words guide our thinking, as she writes:

The famous Puerto Rican song, “En mi Viejo San Juan” has described the sentiments of many in the Puerto Rican diaspora. The song, written in 1943 by Noel Estrada for his brother stationed in Panamá, recounts memories of life in San Juan and the long-awaited return: “My heart remained at the seafront in Old San Juan.” Listening to this song sometimes makes me a little homesick, but, most of the time, it evokes warm, nostalgic feelings and brings forth memories of the cobblestone streets and blue seas of my hometown.

When hurricane María hit Puerto Rico in 2017, the news footage of the massive category 4 storm contrasted with the lovely memories of the island. The words of the song resonated; my heart was, indeed, at the seafront in Old San Juan. The storm passed, and we anxiously awaited news from our families on the island. Homesickness crept in as we were far away from loved ones and wished to be close to them in the moment of need. Days later, the silence was finally broken by the buzz of a text message: “Estamos bien” (“We’re OK”). Those two words were hope in the midst of chaos. Those words were home. Images of distress, confusion, and fear emerge in Luke 21. In many ways, the feelings that these words evoke mirror the past almost two years of pandemic crisis—a world in turmoil suffering from disasters, both natural and human-made—speaking to the realities and injustices of a chaotic world. Thankfully, Jesus enters this world offering words, not of foreboding, but of hope to a homesick people that felt far away from God and longed to be close to kin in the middle of the crisis. “Stand up and raise your heads,” Jesus said, “because your redemption is near . . . So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near” (v. 28-31). Even in the silence, we are reassured that God’s kin-dom is near. Kin-dom, in Ada María Isasi-Díaz’s definition, is “interconnected community, seeing God’s movement emerge from la familia, the family God makes.” God is close. These are words of hope for a homesick world. These words are home.

1. A Longing for Home

Vilmarie points to some stark and beautiful truths in her reflection. She paints this beautiful vision of home, and honestly, when I read the reflection, I looked up plane tickets for Puerto Rico because the images are just that compelling. She speaks of when homesickness can hit us hardest – when our longing for home and safety is particularly strong when things are not OK at home. And when we find God, when we remember that God is close, we know that the very Kingdom of God is near and our hopes are renewed. And hope, our guiding light for this first Sunday of Advent, will be the way forward as we look towards the day when Christ is born.

1. Home as Community

We’ve spoken a lot about what it feels like to be at home, in our own homes and what that means to us. I would encourage you to continue to meditate upon that this week and how you can bring those elements of hope and home back into your life, as we press forward this season.

 Yet one of the questions that I need to ask you is – what is our community homesick for? As a pastor, I’m homesick for those times of connection, where we enjoy laughter and hugs at fellowship and dig into some delicious treats. I’m homesick for conversations, sometimes for the way things used to be, and for visions of the future that aren’t constrained by ‘buts’ and ‘maybes.’ I’m homesick for those times where things weren’t wrapped up in political ties and where looking for the Holy Spirit in the world was easier. Perhaps I’ve become a little jaded, perhaps we all have, during this little apocalyptic time we are living in, but perhaps the hope of the future can enter into me, enter into each one of us this season.

 I’ve shared those things that I’m homesick for in this community of Christ, but more importantly, I’m curious what you are homesick for in this place? What do you long for here? What would bring you hope, especially in these times? If you could dream big, what would you dream? Where do you see God entering this world, even in challenging times, where do you see the Kingdom being built?

 I really challenge you to hold onto these questions and let them stir within you this week. There are no perfect answers, nor are there any easy ones either. But this is the hard work which builds a community, these are the questions that bring us closer to the Kingdom and the people we long to be as a body of Christ. It is only by rediscovering the home God longs for us to build and doing that in hope, that we can journey towards that night where our hopes become realized in a newborn King.

 May this first Sunday of Advent be the start of something new. May it be one where you dig into the Advent bags and start leaning into the devotionals. May the act of preparing your wreath be a prayerful act, one of family, where the candles that symbolize hope, peace, joy, and love become more than simple symbols, but become a reality in your life. May we step out on this journey, knowing God’s love in profound ways and setting out into the world in a hope for a home that looks more like God’s Kingdom everyday. Amen.