October 18th, 2020

Springfield Presbyterian Church

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

The 222nd Day of March

A Covenant Rooted in Laughter

1. Ancestry

Throughout Scripture, there is a core theme of relationship, certainly with God and one

another, but what I want to look at this morning is more of a genealogical relationship. In some chapters of the Bible, you’ll find lines that tell you x is son of y who is son of z and so on and so forth. These chapters, I’ll fully admit it, are not my favorite by a long shot – because it can be a bit boring. But if you think in larger terms, the overall point is within the larger text: who you are related to matters.

 I often call this body on Zoom this morning, the Springfield Family, and I genuinely believe that we are family. Blood alone does not make a family, but rather, love does. And we see this in our own family structure here at Springfield – we might have our squabbles, we might have riotous laughter, and at major milestones we lift each other up in profound ways. For me, that is the definition of family.

 What brings me even greater comfort is the ties we acknowledge today in our text. It grounds me to understand that I am a child of Abraham – and so are you, and you, and you. We all are. We are part of what is called the Abrahamic Tradition. We, alongside Jews and Muslims alike, connect ourselves to Abraham. How cool is it that we are part of a bigger story, a larger story that breaks down every conceivable wall of gender, race, or religion.

 So, maybe we are bloodline family. Maybe Linda is my 45th cousin 92 times removed, or maybe Bob is my 30th cousin 60 times removed – you get the idea. I don’t think you’ll find the answers on your Family Tree or even through one of the DNA tests on Ancestry.com, but what if we lived our lives with the knowledge that we are so interconnected?

 One of my favorite quotes, that I’m sure you’ve heard me repeat more than once, is from Linda Hogan. She says, “Walking. I am listening to a deeper way. Suddenly all my ancestors are behind me. Be still, they say. Watch and listen. You are the result of the love of thousands.”

 And this is absolutely true. If you feel lonely, if you feel weary, remember that you are the result of the love of thousands, you are a child of God and from the family of Abraham.

II. Covenant

 Now that we’ve firmly established that we are God’s and one another’s, we come upon our text this morning from that viewpoint. We are a covenant people, a people whose relationship with God is based on love, grace, and promise.

 Covenants require compliance. It’s a pledge, a promise, that is often more spiritually bound and carries a different weight or tone than your typical agreement. God promises that Abraham’s love will carry on for generations and that kings and princes and tribes will come from him. And how does Abraham respond: he laughs.

 Sometimes I think the laughter is a bit sceptical or sarcastic, like a, “yeah, right” kind of laughter, but sometimes I think the laughter here is the joy of such an impossibility becoming possible. He laughs, he laughs because he doesn’t understand, he laughs because he can’t imagine a different way or a different world, he laughs because he probably doesn’t think of himself as a father to the nations but rather just an average Joe. When Sarah hears later on that she will give birth and be part of this great tradition, she also laughs. Sarah laughs because she is ninety years old, she laughs because she alike Abraham probably doesn’t think of herself as the mother of nations, and she laughs because this dream that is so inconceivable of being able to bear a child is becoming a reality. They laugh, we laugh, because sometimes, whether in scepticism or joy, we find ourselves completely baffled by God making the impossible possible.

 Now, a promise is always reciprocal, so we can’t say that this is Abraham’s gift. Abraham has to respond and so does his people – the men need to be circumcised. Now, as a modern day reader and as a woman, I had to investigate this point a little bit further and push past my discomfort. Why would God ask the men to do this? Why is this important and why is this the covenant act?

 Much of it is contextual. It is a physical act that is a signifier of faithfulness, it is a token of faith, it is seen as part of belonging. And this act functioned as a metaphor of faith for Israel in places like Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and so on. There’s a consistent theme here, and though I am squeamish as a modern day theologian, I also respect that cultural differences were significantly at play here. God needed a physical sign of commitment, it was the other end of the promise, and an important part of being together.

 One of the questions I ask though is – what about the women? Is the covenant promise only bound for men? Again, there’s some cultural complexities here in the patriarchal society, but let us not forget that Sarah was part of the promise too. She would have the responsibility, struggle, and joy of carrying a boy to term. Ultimately, Sarah’s faithfulness was in her giving birth to Isaac, for she cemented the covenant promise in that act alone.

1. Where is our Laughter

When we follow God, when we submit and commit to a covenant to live a life worthy of

Christ, there is sacrifice and there is hardship just like we see with Abraham and Sarah, but there is also this incredible joy. There is this joy that can lead us to laughter, even that laughter that leads us to crying so hard because we cannot contain our joy to our bodies alone.

 In this covenant that we hear this morning, we are reminded again and again to meet God’s covenant with joy and to see those things that seem incredibly impossible or unrealistic as a possibility. This morning, we are given the gift to open the door to what feels unattainable. This morning, we are given freedom, and thus, a sense of joy.

 You’ve heard it before and you’ll hear it again – all things are possible in God. It’s proven right here, right in this moment. Now, it doesn’t mean that all the things that we want are possible – but if it is God’s divine purpose, even those things that seem impossible are indeed possible.

 When you live in that mindset, you get to live into joy, even in the difficulties of these days. May you remember today that you are part of a large family, from this body here to the very descendants of Abraham. May you also remember, with joy and laughter, as we celebrate together, the freedom of new life and new opportunities we have in Jesus Christ. Amen.