Springfield Presbyterian Church

June 13th, 2021

The Homecoming

1. For All the Words In the World…

As I sat down to write this sermon for today, I realized that my words cannot really sum up the magnitude of what it feels like to be here this morning. It isn’t a matter of self esteem, it is a matter of situation – because this is the first time in fifteen months that we have the opportunity to meet in person, in this sanctuary. Words fail, but they fail beautifully, in the light that we cannot express adequately what today feels like, what it feels like to come home.

As many of you know as well, I am coming back into the sanctuary after a time away, a time to reflect, to refocus, and to reenergize. As the last week of leave culminated, I started to hone in on what it means to come back, to come home, to start a new season of life together. I realized quickly that home is a place that is wonderfully complicated. We come together in joy, to see one another’s faces for the first time in so long, and that joy overwhelms us as we are gathered. We come together with trauma, recognizing that these last months have been far from easy, but have probably challenged every bone in our body and we long for healing. We come together with some level of ambiguity – who we were once is no longer who we are now, and so how does that change how we interact and live together. Home is a place of joy, a place of healing, a place of renewal, a place of conflict, a place of comfort, a place that will mean something different to each of us, but yet, here we are, once again, at this place called home.

1. The Prodigal Son

The text I chose for this week is not our lectionary text, but it is

one that speaks to what it means to come home. It is a story that most of us know well, about that son who wanted his inheritance so he could leave home and live this grand life, only to find out that money can only take you so far for so long. I imagine he feels some shame as he starts to walk the path home. Maybe he feels guilty for leaving his family, perhaps he struggles that he didn’t connect with them and was distracted, and now he comes home with what feels like nothing except for the clothes on his back.

And dad runs up, he runs up that path with a level of enthusiasm that most parents can probably understand. He runs up because yes, he might have been hurt by his son’s actions, and perhaps they talk about that later…but that’s not this moment. This moment is a moment of increasing joy. While I’m not a parent, I imagine those who do have children – when you see them pull into the driveway after a long time away, you don’t stand there and recount faults and time outs and issues from the past. Right there in the doorframe, you see the one whom you love coming home and back into your arms, and that means everything, again – words cannot describe that feeling adequately.

And so the father in our story says to get the best on the table, a fatted calf and gets a robe and a ring and adorns this son who has sinned, but is still incredibly loved. Maybe in modern time, it’s like when someone comes home, we wrap our arms around them, open up the best wine in the cellar, and use the fancy silverware, because this is cause for celebration!

And yet, there is a third player in this story, the older brother who has a good reason to be cross at his younger brother. You see, the older brother stayed with dad, took care of the land – why isn’t he being celebrated? What about his commitment to the family, his love and strength, even when times were tough and there was nothing to reap in the field. I think it is wise to recognize this son, even if the celebration doesn’t feel fair in the moment, because I believe he will also be celebrated for his endurance and his commitment, just in a way we do not hear in this story.

1. Who are we?

Today, I can tell you, that I feel like the younger brother who

comes home and I wonder if you do too. I feel like God, as Father, is calling us up the path and saying, ‘Welcome home! I know times have been tough and I know you’ve had to serve me in challenging circumstances, but times are shifting, and I’m so glad you are here.’ And it feels appropriate to bring out the fatted calf, or maybe the fellowship cookies and coffee, and take stock of what it means to be here. No longer will I take a hug for granted, or the laughter at fellowship, or the voices combined in choir, or the sound of children playing. Things suddenly carry a more sentimental tone – a tone that is one of gratitude at what we have missed and what we can now enjoy.

1. A time to Reconnect

I also recognize that as I stand here, with gratitude in my heart

and joy in my soul for a homecoming, I also know that the last fifteen months have left their mark for all of us. I wish we could easily and simply join back together and maybe not have to remember the struggle – yet the struggle is what shapes us, creates us, and moves us forward to something new and different.

Again, in my last week of leave, I concentrated on what it meant to come home and for me, the word that kept coming up in my mind was, ‘reconnection.’ For me, this is a season to reconnect – a time to perhaps slow down in the summer sun and enjoy a cup of tea together, or maybe it’s about having a cookout and hearing stories, or perhaps it’s feelings of hardship or conflict that need to be mended through reconnection and renewal. This season of reconnection involves a lot of listening, some speaking, maybe some tears, and hopefully some laughter. This is not a season I want to rush through, this is a season I think we are called to as we continue to grow and live and serve as God’s own in our community and beyond.

One of my hopes in this time of reconnection is also a sense of renewal – I want to hear what it means to come back home for you. What does it look like? What makes this place the sacred place it is for you? What would bring you joy to see in our worship and life together? What do you think we no longer need?

This past Winter, I met a woman named Kissa from Texas and it was not only the time of pandemic, but I happened to meet her when Texas suffered from flooding and power outages. Her entire church, in a matter of night, had to be gutted and restructured and her community would not only have to rebuild spiritually, but physically, they had to tear down and create a whole new building. When she could have absolutely had a breakdown, she had a breakthrough – and the words she said then, stay with me now. She said, “Don’t waste a good crisis to create change.”

That sense stays with me right here and right now – we’ve seen this crisis, we will feel the pangs of this crisis that we have endured for a while yet, but in our season of reconnection and renewal, I hope that something good comes out of the struggle. I hope that the feeling that the father had at seeing the son come up the path in our Scripture today is one that carries us now. I hope you feel the welcome, I hope you sense the joy, I hope you find your energy and soul reinvigorated as we gather again.

My friends, it is good to be together. Welcome home. Thanks be to God. Amen.