Springfield Presbyterian Church

March 21st, 2021

Fifth Sunday of Lent

The Messiah’s Troubled Heart

1. A first reading

This is one of those heart-wrenchingly difficult Sundays before Easter. This Sunday and next Sunday, where we will celebrate Palm and Passion Sunday, we have to grapple with some very hard truths – Christ came into the world not to condemn the world, but to love God’s people so much that he is willing to die on a cross for their sins. It is news I am grateful for – in the sense that I am grateful for a Savior that would love me and you so much that he would be willing to die…but I don’t want my Savior to have to die.

It seems that every year when I come upon this text and ones like it, I feel like Peter. I want to jump in front of Jesus and beg for another way – a way that isn’t filled with gory images, or blood, or death. Yet, just like Peter, I imagine Jesus would look at me and say, “Get behind me, Satan” …or maybe a nicer, “Thank you for trying to save me, but this is the way it needs to be.”

And while we have years and years of prophecy that indicate that this is the way it has to be – I still question in 2021 a way out. My heart is troubled, my soul is troubled because my own Messiah’s heart is troubled too – and maybe yours is as well, because the Savior who we have come to know and love and follow and rejoice over miracles and sit at table at the Passover supper – now has to leave. And not in a – leave town, kind of way, but we have to watch a gory crucifixion on a cross, not because of Jesus’ doing, but our own.

And I can’t make it better for you, which is hard, because as your pastor, I want to. I want to knit this story up in soft cotton and find the holy message of gentleness and joy. But that is not the word today, that is not the reality we are called to live in; so my question changes as my heart aches, how are we to carry this reality with love, grief, and meditating a hope to come.

1. Gratitude

Jesus knows his destiny: we can imagine he’s known all this time as he has been crafting miracles and walking with the unloved and journeying alongside his disciples with aching feet but hopeful hearts. And maybe this is an unchartered opportunity to think about the life Jesus has lived before we reach today’s text and it’s unfolding.

I love to think about a Savior, born under the comfort of stars and welcomed in unconventional ways. I am curious to consider Christ as a teen, growing up on the tough streets of Nazareth and the many things he saw and had to contend with in his mind as a growing boy. I feel bad for Mary and Joseph as Jesus goes missing one day and ends up teaching the teachers – how scared the parents must have been and how alarming it must be to know your Son is not like the other kids at the temple. I find joy in Jesus’ first miracle, as he turns water into wine at the wedding at Cana, and I often tell friends that this indicates that Jesus loves us and wants us to have fun. I find frustration at parables and sayings I can’t understand, no matter how long I study, and I wish Jesus would set the record straight and speak plainly. I am encouraged that Jesus didn’t think this road was for him to walk alone – I love that he asked folks to join and follow him and see the journey that unfolds. I know I am challenged when I consider the Jesus who sits with the unlikely, unloved, and people on the streets. The life of Jesus calls us to more.

So as we come today to this passage, we come with the entire story as we know it of Jesus’ life thus far. We know our Savior, as best we can, and we learn and lean in as the mood shifts. Do you hear that sadness in Christ’s voice this morning? Do you hear that he knows it’s his journey, it’s the path ahead, but it still makes him sad. I think that’s an invitation to us as well – to grieve with our Savior, to recognize that this is hard and messy and grief-filled. He saves us with love, but he does not save us from seeing the challenges of this world. He doesn’t beautify it, dull it, or deny it – he is fully participating in this call to the cross and we are called, as hard as it is, to be right alongside listening, watching, waiting, praying, heeding, crying, longing, and awaiting for that light that seems to disappear to reenter our lives. You can’t get out of the toughness of Lent, so what do we do? How are we faithful?

1. Reflection

I’m afraid the answer I have is not one that you will love, but something that you will still step into with faithfulness. The call today is to be humble, to be struck by the challenge of the words we find in the Gospel, to try and not to rewrite it to soften our hearts, and to continue to find those words hard to say and hard to hear.

In a tangible sense, you can discern what will best help you this week in digesting this passage. Perhaps there are verses of poetry that you write down, seeking to explore the tension of the suffering Savior. Maybe the invitation is to art – to paint or draw or observe art that pulls you in to these Lenten days. I imagine, as a congregation that loves music, it might be the soft or even harsh sharps and flats on the piano that help us to live into the story. It could be silence, the eerie, echoing silence that you find when you paddle out to the middle of a lake or stand alone ushered in the dense area of a forest.

Let the servant who loves you enough that he would put his life on the line for you and me, sinners and saints, be praised in the many ways our senses allow. And may you be guided by the Spirit into the ways you can best understand how God is speaking to you in this Lenten season today. Amen.