**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**March 2nd, 2022**

**Ash Wednesday Reflection/Meditation**

**Burying Alleluias**

1. Burying Alleluias

You may catch me saying a word, often quietly, because I’m a

proper Presbyterian, but it’s a word that can’t help but to leave my mouth when I hear good news or feel gratitude or even a bit of relief. It’s beyond any formal thinking at this point, it’s more instinctual than anything else, my lips cannot help but utter it. I’ve been saying it since I was a kid, since I sat in the pews at my home church to standing at the pulpit today. The word? The word is ‘alleluia.’

 Alleluia translates roughly as Praise Him or Praise the Lord – it’s a joyful response that so many of our Biblical ancestors had when they had these similar human experiences. It is a quick, easy, and automatic way to praise God and share joy.

 You can imagine my dismay though when I was in seminary and during the Lenten season, I said alleluia and I was tossed some not-so-friendly theological looks. As it turns out, the word alleluia isn’t supposed to be said during the Lenten season. This practice started as early as the 5th century but became commonplace in the Western church in the Middle Ages.

 The rough idea is that alleluia is a joyous word, it’s one that the angels sing, it’s a word that doesn’t belong in our reflective and more contemplative world during Lent. We remove it from the Gospels, we step back and we realize that saying alleluia is a privilege, not a right.

1. Burying the Alleluia

So this is the last night, the last chance, for me to sneak in the

word as we start this journey of Lent. You will probably even catch me, if you look closely at the pulpit, restraining my Alleluias to ‘Al-ahem.’ I miss the alleluias every year and this year, I’m doing a tangible practice that is new to me that I hope you will join me in spirit.

 Here are some scrabble letters and as you see, they spell ‘alleluia.’ Tonight, we bury them. In front of you, I’ll put them in a coffee can and put the seal on and tomorrow I’ll dig the hole and mark the ground. That’s where our alleluias will live for the time being, buried, unexposed, hidden from the world.

1. Easter

I’ll miss the word alleluia and nothing else quite fits in its place.

But instead, I will wait, I will bite my tongue, I will walk the road called Lent and will look forward. I will ask God many questions and I hope God will ask many of me. I hope, again, you will join me on this like-minded journey.

The blessing though, my friends, is that we know the story set

before us. We know that as Spring comes, things come to the surface. And just as Spring is here, so is Easter, and that tin of alleluias will be taken out of the ground and shown for all to see. The alleluias will be loud – I will probably be to the point of obnoxiously yelling it on Easter morning, because the joy that we’ve set down and hidden can no longer be contained.

 So, in the meantime, we bury the alleluias, we wait, we hope, we long, we seek, and we search. We mark ourselves tonight with ashes as a tangible sign of that journey that we are promising to travel. May we bury our alleluias, may we mark the path and the way ahead, and anticipate with joy a new day to dawn. Amen.