July 12th , 2020

Springfield Presbyterian Church

6th Sunday after Pentecost

**Take Root, Thrive, and Grow**

1. The Parable of the Sower

 For many of us, the parable of the sower is not a new read. It may not be the most familiar of all of the Gospel texts, but chances are that you’ve read it through and the immediate message is fairly clear. The most obvious interpretation is simply put – those who build their knowledge of God on the path, or really do not invest at all in faith, will easily be snatched up by whatever the next best thing is out there. Those who build their faith on rocky ground will be able to get through this life with the easy answers, but when the going gets tough, they are also plucked up by whatever belief is comfortable. Yet those who take the time and do the work, those who plant their seed in ground that is well nourished will see growth and thrive.

 And we see this in real time – for those who do the hard work and really invest in learning about God and challenging their perceptions and questions, we see growth. Faith should change as we go through our lives, there are times we are more faithful or less faithful, or times where our questions are just too hard to unravel, and other times where we feel God’s love and nourishment overflow that we can be a blessing to others.

 What I think the parable of the sower might have missed in this tale is that the good soil was bought at a high price. If you’ve had a garden, you know, you have to till the soil and take out the weeds and to really have strong fruit-bearing soil is often backbreaking and sweat-inducing. And as for the seed in the soil, it has to tear through the ground, making new roots as it goes, challenging itself to stretch beyond and grow deeper and deeper.

 This may seem like too high a cost, but again, the gardener knows the fruit of their labor – the beautiful blossom that grows strong or the tree whose rings grow from year to year, continuing to be sturdy.

II. Who is the Gardener?

 You could interpret the parable in different ways – is God the gardener, or is it we who are gardening and planting seeds? The answer is probably a yes, for each view has its own merit. But that’s not why we are here this morning, that’s a question for another day. What I think is easily conveyed in the parable is that if we are going to be Christ followers, we have to be willing to dig deep, stretch our roots in uncomfortable ways, and whatever seasons of life come up, even the heaviest of storms, we’ve got enough root in the ground to keep ourselves planted.

 The truth is – we are called to take root, thrive, and grow. Every Sunday morning, when I deliver a sermon, the important part for me is that you hear what God is saying and then you have something to do with that knowledge. For example, you see God’s love through Jesus Christ, and that calls you to love in new and tangible ways. Or, you see wandering in the wilderness and you are able to help someone who is in their own wilderness because you know God will carry you through. Or, you see the fishermen who would leave their boats and everything behind to follow Christ and that moves you to be brave and leave what you know behind for something new and exciting. Or, you hear the story of the prodigal son and you realize that maybe you can go home. Or, you listen to the building of the Ark and hear Noah’s protestors and see that you might be called to do something scary and big even while people claim it won’t come to anything.

 Or, or, or. That’s about 5 sermon topics right there, but you see, we take what is in this book and we give eyes and ears and new meaning to it. The Scriptures, I dare, don’t mean all that much, if we hear a story, close the book shut, and go about our lives unchanged.

 And the work is hard but it doesn’t have to be boring. Isaiah shares the joy that happens when we take in the Word. Isaiah says that the Word that goes out from his mouth shall not return empty – the Word will be nourished and sown and cared for so that the Word means more. And this is a joyful act, Isaiah says that the trees of the field will clap their hands, that mountains and hills will sing with joy. This very act of learning and then pursuing God’s Word in real time is enough to make you clap your hands and stomp your feet. Yes, even us, the Presbyterians.

 III. Steeped in the Word

 So, how are you going to, like a good cuppa tea, steep yourself in the Word? I guess the easiest answer would be...to read it. But again, that’s just the beginning, because one read through doesn’t really let it all sink in. Sometimes it is a matter of reading the Word over and over again, for others it is singing a hymn that relates to the text, or engaging in art that gives some visual sense of what is happening. There’s also additional books upon books for reference, devotions, or additional study guides – and as your resident nerd/minister – I’m happy to give you find that right book.

 And then we go beyond it – beyond our reading, listening, singing, seeing and...we do something. Inspired by the Word, and encouraged by the community, we stretch our roots just that bit further and we do something a bit daring, a bit new, a bit challenging. Or...incredibly daring. Sometimes the leaps of faith are small hops and some look feel like jumping Cliffside to Cliffside.

 There’s no promise that taking root, thriving, and growing will be fun, but there’s no mandate that it has to be dry and boring either. Wherever the Word takes you, the promise is true, God is with you, with me, as we read the easier texts and the harder ones. That’s a covenant promise that does not change.

IV. Go and Learn

 And so, may you go from this place, and may you open the Word. Open it to a story familiar or one you’ve never heard before. Read it, maybe read it a few times, read it out loud, read it in different versions. See what encourages you, what bothers you, what you’ve noticed before and what you’ve never noticed before. Go and look up hymns or songs or works of art that have been created about that passage, if there are – sometimes there are not. And then sit with it, write down ways in which you might act upon what you hear and what you see.

 That is...the life of faith, is it not? It is the work of every one of us, throughout this life, that our faith takes root and thrives and grows. It doesn’t happen overnight, it is a lifelong pursuit. May you feel the Holy Spirit’s nudging and guiding as you live out this life of learning and discipleship and may you know the love of this community as a conversation partner in living out the Word. Wherever you are on the journey, may you take root, may you thrive, and may you continue to grow – this day and always. Amen.