**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**March 6th, 2022**

**Lent I**

**An Oasis in the Wilderness**

1. Lent when you don’t want to Lent

I looked at my husband this week and said, “I don’t want to Lent

this year.” Maybe that’s blasphemous for a pastor to say, but hear me out first. With all the world events that have swirled around us, the struggles of the pandemic, and a society that is already on edge – the last thing I want to do is to think more about that kind of world. I want to be the queen of the silver lining, I want to find the good, I want to look ahead and run towards the Kingdom where everything is good and holy and pure and no harm or pain exists.

 But as I was speaking with Bryan, the lyrics of a Rolling Stones song came to mind, ‘You can’t always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you might find you get what you need.” I may not want to be immersed in a Lent that makes me face the hard grit of life, the temptations of this world, or see the evil and name it around me. But, if I try, if I focus, if I invest myself in a Lent that points to wandering the wilderness, I’ll get what I need – a more expansive faith, a fuller life, a stronger faith. As this is true for me, may it be true for you as well.

 My friends, I can’t guarantee that Lent will be easy, in fact, I sense it will call us to some of our roughest edges, but we go through this time together, we live the journey together, and every day we reorient ourselves and repoint ourselves to a fuller and more expansive life and faith. In other words, though we are looking for an oasis in the wilderness for a break, I’m sorry, but we’re going to have to hang out in the desert for a while.

1. Jesus in the Desert

Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, is clear with the devil, with evil

itself, that evil will not win. Not only will it not win, but Jesus doesn’t even give the devil a chance to sweep in even with the finest of temptations or tests.

 As a follower of Christ, I think to myself – well, of course, it’s easy for Jesus, because Jesus is God – he can shake the evil off and not even seem to flinch. But I’m not Jesus, you aren’t Jesus – yet we are called to be like Jesus so…where do we even begin? Jesus shows us what we are supposed to look like and act like in the desert, but here’s the tricky part – the devil is sneaky.

 The devil isn’t an entity I like to speak about very often, perhaps it’s because I honestly think of other traditions where the devil is portrayed in ways that paralyze people’s faith and sense of self. When we speak about the devil, it’s cast in very doom and gloom personifications.

 And…in truth…the devil is in the doom and gloom, but I find myself choosing a different word to say ‘devil’ – I use the word ‘evil.’. I would be remiss and wrong to claim there is no evil in the world. If you listen and look around, you find it in violence, divisiveness, homophobia, sexism, racism, ageism, classism and any other ‘ism’ that comes to mind. What we see right now happening in the Ukraine is evil – it is an abuse of power, control, and reign.

 We know those evils and I urge you to fight and speak against them. Yet, there’s those undercover evils or temptations, the ones that aren’t shown on the daily news, but might happen at a dinner table, a school classroom, or in an exchange between people.

1. The sneaky evils

A very concrete temptation that isn’t often labeled as an evil are

the ways in which our society crafts norms that are not normal, healthy, nor humane. In a tangible sense, I am speaking about the distorted image on Instagram that portrays a life that is wanted but not real. I am speaking about American society where perfectionism is not a reality that can be obtained, but one that is somehow expected. When we tell kids from a young age that how they do in elementary and middle school will shape their college career and beyond – not only are we doing a disservice, but we are pushing away a childhood that is meant for mistake making and playing and pushing boundaries. When we use the words, “I shoulda, coulda, woulda” and more, we point to the ways we have fallen short, but we also point to a society that wants more and more of our actions, but doesn’t tend to the soul.

 Evil is sneaky, temptation creeps in, and it’s important to recognize both the big ways and the small ways it works in our world and in our lives. It’s only in doing that work, in seeing evil for what it is that you can be in the desert and speak against it and seek to live a life that is counterintuitive to all the push and pull it wants to create and wreak havoc in our lives.

1. 40 Days

I’ll continue to bum you out this very real news you already

know – it won’t take us 40 days to get rid of evil. Honestly, if that were the case, that’d be a lovely world to live in and we would have already accomplished it. Evil will always persist until the Kingdom comes, so you may ask – if that’s the case, is it worth the fight?

 And I would tell you, it is absolutely worth the fight. For a few reasons. If we are complacent with evil, it grows, and manifests and is ingrained in our society deeper and deeper and becomes harder and harder to fight. The fight is also worth it because we are able to diminish evil, in those eventual oasis moments, to see the Kingdom at work, to see the glimmers of light and joy and holiness and even if the oasis time is brief, the work is worthwhile. Bottom line, it’s what we are called to, it is what Jesus shows his disciples and calls us to do in the here and now. So, we must press on.

1. No fun.

On the record, I didn’t promise the work of the desert to be fun,

but it has the opportunity to be profound, it has the possibility of informing how we live our lives when we know what we are fighting against, fighting for, and fighting to become. You have to name the evil and name the fight as a worthwhile one as we begin this journey of deeper soul searching and seeking a more expansive faith.

 While this may not be fun news, it is faithful news, we believe in a God who does not leave us in the wilderness or the desert alone, but we are also a people filled by the Holy Spirit. We also have texts to anchor us, not only the one we hear today, but the ones of the Israelites and wandering, the wilderness of Job, or the struggles of the Biblical prophets trying to speak in a world that does not want to hear prophecy.

 We also, again, are not alone in the wilderness when we join here together in worship or when we dare to speak up in fellowship. This community we have is one created around the belief of a God who defeats evil and guides his believers to do the same. We each have a part of the story, we have wisdom and strategies, we have guidance and loving-kindness. When we are able to honestly share with one another where we have seen evil, to name it, and to ask each other, ‘what now?’ We can help each other, lift one another up, and stand together as a people who not only want more, but need more – a richer, more joyful, less evil world to live in for ourselves, for our children, and for our children’s children. May you know you are not alone, may you feel empowered to do the work, and may it instill in you a deeper love and a deeper sense of who and whose you are as we journey all our days. Amen.