Springfield Presbyterian Church

June 9th, 2024

For Such a Time as This

1. A Time for Reconciliation

Pride is a time of joy – it is a time to celebrate who and whose

we are and delight in the diversity amongst us that creates this beautiful family. Yet, before we celebrate, there has to be a time for atonement – a space for reconciliation; a time to name the truths that we must confront. My father often reminded me a child that one of the vital reasons we study history, particularly the more difficult parts of it, is not only to know it, but more so, to ensure that we do not repeat it. Along those lines, I think of a quote from Maya Angelou that we’ve shared here before, “When you know better, do better.” So, let us name a few of those historical truths, especially in the realm of church life, that remind us that indeed the work has started, but it is not yet over. The month of Pride is not only celebration, but continued action toward greater equality.

I think, as a Presbyterian, it can be easy to look around these days and perhaps rest on my laurels. The PC(USA), in contrast to many other Christian denominations, is one that accepts and celebrates the ordination of LGBTQIA+ people. As a bi-sexual woman preacher, I find so much joy that I can be at the pulpit when my siblings, both women and LGBT+ individuals did not have the same access in years past. Sometimes, up here, I can put the fight behind me and forget the history.

Did you know, it was only in 2010 that LGBT+ people were accepted for ordination by the PC(USA)? It was only 14 years ago. And this still sends shivers down my back – the vote was **373** in favor and **323** against. A margin of 50 votes. That’s it. It was not an overwhelming majority, we saw many churches go and join other more conservative denominational siblings. There was definite tension; there still is. The fact that I can stand here before you, fully ordained and out is not something I can take for granted, even in the 14 years that have passed. I take pause at the history, knowing that so many voices have been silenced, and in knowing the history, I will make every effort that I can to ensure that all voices can be heard.

The journey still continues in 2024 as the PCUSA meets nationally at General Assembly. One of the rich blessings of being a Presbyterian is we have ‘freedom of conscious.’ Essentially, it means we can joyfully disagree or not have the same opinion and still be in fully relationship. As a confessional church, we abide by the Westminster Confession, which tells us that God alone is Lord of the conscious. Most days, this is a great gift.

What that means though is that each church gets to decide, based upon their conscious, whether they will accept an LGBT+ person for ordination as minister, elder, or deacon. For example, in 2016, when I was seeking a call, there was a church in New Jersey that outright shared with me that though I had an “impressive educational background, they would not accept an LGBT+ pastor.” Now, on one hand – I said – that’s fine, I want a community that accepts all of me and I got that gift in Springfield. On the other hand, when you sit and think about it, we have to consider how difficult that is to hear – Becca, you are smart, you are ordainable, but you are sinful and we do not accept you. There is no equality act of hiring or ordaining someone – in 2010, the PCUSA gave permission, but any church, till this very day, can still opt out. Next month, there is an active debate on whether the PCUSA should have something akin to a hiring equality act or whether that would go against our polity and theology.

Now, we could argue all day long about this – freedom of conscious is a great thing, it’s integral to who we are; but if our freedom of conscious involves hurting a specific group of people…is that really the best use of this freedom? It gets philosophical fast. Now, here’s the point I’m trying to get to – here’s what I need you to hear – we have made significant strides, they have been hard fought and hard won, but the work is not over in the slightest. From the work in the church, to the work outside these walls – we cannot rest until each individual, beloved by God, knows how deeply beloved they are by those who serve God. Until each person, regardless of their race, education, gender, sexual identity, or any variation therein knows that they are loved – they are welcomed in every sanctuary, every table, every pulpit – our job is not done yet. We have come a long way, my friends, but the work must continue.

1. Scripture

As we hear from our Scripture today, we are encouraged by the

power of good work. I love that resounding sentiment from Esther’s story – perhaps, maybe, it was for a moment like this that you were born. I wonder how it felt for Esther to feel or hear that – perhaps I was born during a time of great upheaval to help prevent a genocide? What a profound responsibility and a humbling honor to be a part of history like that. Mordecai, as we hear the story, indicates that she can indeed stay silent, but it will be at the cost of her life and her family’s life. Esther’s actions are not only necessary, but brave, as she knows that her life is in danger. She rises to this enormous task, and in this story, we are also called to an incredible task as well – to be a sign of life, rather than death, in a world that so deeply needs some good news.

Perhaps, you and I were born for a time like this – a time where the concept of gender and sexual identity are ever evolving and flowing. Perhaps we were born to be peacekeepers, to be advocates for change, to be people that show love in difficult times. I want you to hear your name in the call – Diana, you were born for such a time as this, Christy, you were born for such a time as this – and say it to yourself, with your name – for we were born for such a time as this. What a great responsibility and a great honor – as we continue today and in the days and weeks ahead, I pray that you hear that phrase in your head and may it compel you toward action for the good of all.

In our New Testament reading, we hear Jesus being accused of being satan, simply because he was creating change. Change is a beautiful thing, but it can also be scary and feel like everything is disjointed. It forces those in power to get uncomfortable fast, and so, when Jesus is accused, he offers the parable we just heard. It is simply put – how could satan drive out satan, why would he? The accusation by people in power is dubious, at best, and Jesus knows it. What is perhaps more profound for us though in this moment is when Jesus hears that his mom and brothers are waiting, and he tells those who can hear him, “Anyone who does God’s will is my sibling.” Jesus’ family is fully inclusive, not determined by blood line or political favor, but by the decisive notion that all who follow God are family.

Though I cannot say this verse was the one that inspires me to call us the Springfield Family – the notion is the same. We are all family – and not in a cult-y kind of way – we are family because we all have this same goal – to serve Christ in compelling ways that promote love and justice in the world. That is what makes us family. It is not blood, it is not political party – it is our purpose, that brings us into these pews, into one another’s homes, into one another’s hearts and prayers.

Family, and yes – whether this is your first time here or not, you’re part of the fam – and again, it’s not in a weird way – family, we were born for a time such as this. Let that be an acknowledgement and a way to propel us forward as we seek out a world where all are accepted and profoundly loved.

1. Poem

As I conclude this sermon, I’d like to share with you a powerful

poem called, “The Bravest Thing We Can Do” by Rev. Sarah Speed. Let it be a prayer that resounds in your heart – let it be the joyful reminder that you are beloved, even when the world tells you otherwise. Let it be the voice that spurs you forward, in this time and place, to proclaim this good news of God’s belovedness to all whom you encounter. Let it be the song of your heart, the word on your lips, the rhythm of your life – the love of God that has moved generations in the past, generations in the future, and the heartbeat that moves amongst us in this very moment. Let us hear this poem, this prayer, together:

Trust your belovedness.

Let it be a protest,

Let it be an act of resistance,

Let it be a song of celebration.

Trust your belovedness in a world that is rarely satisfied.

Wear it like a badge of honor.

Speak it as confidently as you speak your last name.

Tattoo it on your heart.

When outside forces chip away at your sense of self,

When life asks you to hand over the keys,

Remember, remember the waters.

Remember creation.

Remember how it was good, so very good.

Let that truth, that truth alone, hum through your veins.

Sing it so loud, that it drowns out the weariness of the world.

For the bravest thing we can ever do,

Is to trust that we belong here.

Alleluia and Amen.