**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**February 11th, 2022**

**Blessed Are Those…**

1. **Tender**

I remember preaching on our text this morning, the Sermon

on the Mount, around the time I received my diagnosis of Hereditary Spastic Paraplegia. The sermon was raw and as you can imagine, so was I. It’s still stings a little bit to read it today, but it reads differently.

The essence that I had during that time of preaching was

that…if this is how Jesus defines blessing, if he defines it as being poor or hungry or in want or ill…then I don’t want to be blessed. And furthermore, how could the God I know, the God I love and the God who I know wants me to be whole – how could he want this for me or for you? This is wrong, this is just absolutely outright wrong.

And to this day, I don’t believe that Jesus wants us to be martyrs. I look at pastors who preach this text and ask their congregation to be martyrs for the cause of Jesus. Yes, be humble, yes, give when you are able, yes, choose love first – but not to the point of destroying yourself. Frankly, Jesus came into this world and gave us salvation and because of that great love, we do try to be a blessing because we are so moved by this love, not because we need to be martyrs and count up our good deeds. When Jesus says, blessed be the poor – I don’t think Jesus wants you poor on the streets and huddled for warmth.

As you can tell, Jesus and I continue to work through this text together.

1. Two Years

But, as they say, with time, you get both older and

wiser…hopefully. I wouldn’t say that I would take away anything I’ve stated before, the feelings still ring true, but my perception of what blessed and blessing means has had to be a bit remodeled.
 I wouldn’t wish my genetic diagnosis on anyone, but it’s also changed how I perceive this life and the places where I can best work and thrive. All the sudden, I’m more aware of stairs and how we think we might be handicap friendly, but how we often aren’t. I have the blessing of be able to name it and help inform others and change it, thus my experience becomes a blessing for the next person down the road to hopefully struggle less.

 It’s also been a blessing as a way of opening up conversations. Just last week, I started this new PT program with a lovely nurse at ACAC in Timonium. Nurse Steve is a wonderful, sensitive soul, and you can tell in his being that he wants to help in any way he can. When he asked me what my profession was, I shared with him that I was a minister, and with no judgment but pure curiosity, “Wow…how do you do that work with this disease?”

 Fair question, Nurse Steve. It was a good question, because I had to put words on the spot to something that is very hard to convey. I told him that my relationship with Jesus was complicated, but that it was beautiful. Sometimes I yell at the skies, sometimes I’m completely in awe. I don’t think I’ll ever truly make sense of this disease. What I do know that there are many things I don’t need to understand to believe.

 Yes, 100% I want a cure, but if this my life, then may it be a blessing, may it be an example, of what it looks like to be a holy troublemaker who both delights and gets frustrated with God.

 Maybe you can relate, perhaps not with hereditary spastic paraplegia, but we all have our ‘things’ in this life. We all have our own individual battles and we now have a shared experience and trauma of pandemic. We’ve faced questions of mortality and why x, y, and z have happened and we’ve witnessed to grief on many different levels. Where is the blessing in that? Blessing has been harder to find, but when things get tough, we’ve learned that looking for the blessing and gratitude is what pulls and pushes us through.

 As your pastor, I promise to never tell you I know the answers, honestly, I’m just walking alongside you in this faith journey we all are in. I don’t know why difficult things happen, and even if I did, I’m not sure that it would make my human heart feel any better. The best I can do, the best any of us can do, is to stand alongside one another and listen, or yell at the skies together, or take in the awe and joy of things magnificent and unexplainable.

1. Picture Perfect

 Maybe, being blessed doesn’t mean having the picture perfect life of a partner, a pet, and 2 kids in an A-frame house with picket fences. As it is said, money can’t buy you happiness, but…financial security can sure reduce stress. The conversation about blessing in this passage is very polar – rich to poor, happy to mourning, strong to weak with no fuzzy grey area, no in between, which is where most of us live our lives. We don’t live in the extreme, but maybe Jesus has something more to tell us.

 I’ll be sharing a clip from the Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber after the sermon, where she claims the blessed in our society. The blessed are the underpaid teachers and the social workers – people you wouldn’t necessarily think are blessed. But those who have seen the depths, those who have seen the challenges and know the dark realities are the ones who are able to see what really matters. The line I resonate with the most is, “Blessed are the merciful, because they get it.” When you’ve seen a life without mercy, when you are able to take your situation and still be merciful when you have not felt it yourself – that’s the life of faith. They get it, they get the depths of God’s love, because they can see the good and the bad and can find the blessing somewhere in between.

 As the years press on, as I come back to this text, I hope you’ll journey with me. As I learn and as I grow, this text will continue to challenge me as I believe it is meant to challenge us all. Yet as we grow, we learn, and as we learn, we can do better and find out more about why Jesus leads us to this sermon on the mount.

 If you are wondering about my spiritual health, Jesus and I are good. That’s the beautiful thing about our relationship – I know that there is more for me to learn in store and while I have my questions and concerns and frustrations, we believe in a God who loves us enough to reach down in love and say, “I know my child. I will walk with you.” Faith isn’t about figuring it out, answering all the questions, it’s about continuing to return to the text and being challenged again and again. That’s why we meet together in this sanctuary, that’s why we continue to ask these questions year after year, decade after decade. As a people of faith, we are brave, because we are compelled to ask the hard questions and stay in relationship. That’s what faith is and that’s what almighty love does.

1. Question

Usually, I have a question for the week to guide you, but this

week I’ve come up short. I just have this feeling in my heart that you will hear what you need to today and will find your own questions. So, in this messiness of blessing, which walks alongside us, let us continue to live in faith. Let’s turn now and hear Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber’s words as we seek understanding and lean upon faith. Amen.