Springfield Presbyterian Church

June 20th, 2021

The Tightrope of Tension

1. The Welcome Continues…

As I stand before you in the pulpit in this second week of our

reopening, my heart again wants to extend the welcome, to not for a moment take for granted the beauty of what we are able to do as we are gathered here. As we are reconnecting and re-engaging as the body of Christ, in the here and now, after many months apart or through the visual connection of zoom – we are finding ourselves again. For me, it’s really living in this tightrope of tension – it’s recognizing the pain and hurt and challenges that we’ve seen, while also remaining hopeful and faithful to the plan and path that God is setting us upon today and moving forward.

I would like to speak plainly to you the tension that I live in and that perhaps you live in, for the words are hard to speak but important as we each consider how God is moving us individually as well as communally. Today, I would like to offer you a brave testimony.

I think I can speak for all of us when I say – the last fifteen months have been difficult. They’ve challenged the ways in which we worship, how we communicate, and how we live out this call of discipleship in tremendously difficult circumstances. For me, it’s been a season of recognizing some weak spots within my ministry. For the times when I could have reached out and called, but I was too immersed in my own anxiety from this pandemic, I apologize. For the ways in which I didn’t express my needs but tried to bravely endure on my own, rather than relying on the community, I apologize. For the moments in which I tried to live in the tension, but could not, I apologize. This tightrope has not been easy for any of us, and I hope that with me – you are not only able to forgive, but to join me on the tightrope of truth-telling.

I hold these apologies up while also sharing with you how I have sought to balance the line. In these last months, I have undergone extensive coach training in continuing education, I have fought the hard fight of intense spinal physical therapy. Most recently, I’ve also undergone intensive treatment for depression and anxiety, and I have one more week left of the daily treatment. This season has been one of breaking down fully and now I feel in my heart that it is a time of renewal and rebuilding.

Now, I do not tell you all of this for you to feel pity upon me, or even to absolve my past faults or errors, but it occurred to me over these last few weeks that I needed to get back to that transparency that is one of my strongest values. I believe, that if I am asking you to be transparent, then I must be transparent with you – I believe that if I am asking you to do the hard work of discipleship, then I must be willing to do the hard work myself. I try, to the best of my ability, to never ask you to do anything I wouldn’t do myself. This is what it looks like for us to be in human relationship together, bound by the Spirit, working for Christ, and illuminating the ways in which God is calling us in this place and time.

1. Corinthians

It might sound strange, but our New Testament lesson this

morning really speaks to that tightrope of tension that we find in our Christian life together. As we’ve heard before, we know that the Corinthian church is…well, a beloved hot mess. It wants to be a stand out community, but there are tensions that run deep. It wants all the good of Christianity and following Christ without all that tension or human difficulties.

The lesson we hear today, honestly, is a struggle to untangle. The movement from Greek to English in this case makes it look more muddled than anything else. The essence though, from what we can discern, is that Paul is having another ‘come to Jesus’ moment with the Corinthian church. Yet, it is conveyed in great love for one another. He tells the community to refocus, to reopen their hearts to all that God is doing in this time and space, and to recognize that the call comes with all the calamities and struggles, and hardships that are part of being the body of Christ. Paul isn’t telling them this to put a barrier or obstacle before them, he’s just trying to remind them to get back to basics – to remember who and whose they are, the salvation that they’ve been given, and the new life that they are called to live into today.

One of the last lines is a tough one to swallow, but important to acknowledge. Paul tells them that Paul’s affections for their church and their growth are not restricted, but you can tell that he finds their affections for his words to not be present or perhaps conditional. You see, Paul is saying the tough words, the words frankly no one wants to face, but in this letter, thank God for Paul who is willing to open his heart and be transparent and honest, while still being deeply loving.

1. Our Affections and Afflictions

As I hear Paul’s words in this letter, I recognize our affections

and afflictions of these last Months, but I find hope in the call to open our hearts. As I think back on what I shared with you, I hope that your heart is open, and that if you feel so led, for you to open your heart to others in new and brave ways.

This idea of opening our hearts is one that we can hear individually and as a community as we share life together. We live in tension, we won’t always agree, we will struggle and we can feel stymied by struggles and afflictions in our own life – yet the call to more rises up out of those tense and tightrope moments. Here are just a small portion of what has been on my heart as we’ve come to reopen:

The world has changed, how are we changing with it while remaining true to who and whose we are? How do we, as a people of faith, bravely honor the struggle that we’ve seen, while also lifting up the here and now? Again, that question that came from last week’s sermon – we’ve been in a crisis, let us not waste it – so how do we reevaluate what works and doesn’t work? Who are you called to be? Who am I called to be? How do we best do that honor Christ alive and awake in our world today? How do we renew our souls, renew the souls of our congregation, and renew the souls of the community around us and further afield?

If you are curious…I don’t have any good answers to the many questions I’ve laid before you this morning, but there’s something about asking the questions in the first place that leads us to deeper understanding. And perhaps the strange comfort is – those questions can only truly be answered in the life of community, of transparency, of connection, and longing to serve our God.

So let us go from this place and be brave – let us share the tensions we live in and laid our burdens down. Let us start to ask each other those hard questions to see new life. Above all, my family, welcome home, may our hearts be open to all that God is calling us to in this time and place. Amen.