First Presbyterian Church of Soda Springs

11/16/22

130th Anniversary Service

What’s Next?

A couple of weeks ago, I was preaching, as I have a habit of doing on Sunday mornings, and the text that Sunday, was Luke 20:27-38, where Jesus is in the Temple and the Sadducees are trying to trip Jesus up about resurrection.

The title of that particular sermon was “God of the Living,” and, if you’re familiar with that passage, you might think it an odd choice for a sermon on the Sunday after our official anniversary. And, on the surface, it was an odd choice. Usually, sermons around anniversary dates focus on the achievements and history of a congregation and there was quite a bit of that in my message. I noted the growth we’re experiencing while, at the same time, acknowledging the hopes and the fears, the achievements and the setbacks, that are to be expected when looking at a congregation that’s been around for one hundred and thirty years. But ultimately, it was the theme of resurrection that I chose as the focus for that particular sermon

When I arrived here, I started having conversations with the leadership, and there was a real sense that we might not be around too much longer. Membership was low, worship attendance was even lower and it looked like the writing was on the wall for us but, happily, that’s not the case today. Membership is up, as is worship attendance. There’s a renewed sense of energy and excitement here; the Holy Spirit is moving in this place, and I give praise and thanks to God for where we find ourselves at this point in our story. Resurrection, you see, isn’t just confined to individual physical bodies, but is something that I believe can happen to congregations, as well.

As a preacher, I always try and end my sermons questions and a call to action. The questions I posed at the end of that sermon, were these: What’s next? What are we going to do with this new energy, this renewed excitement? How do we use this for the furtherance of God’s Kingdom in this place and at this time?

 As I look at the congregation gathered here tonight, I see Presbyterians worshiping alongside of Catholics, Baptists and members of the LDS church sitting side by side and there’s even a stray Lutheran or two here, as well. What I see is a congregation made up of people who hold very different theological view; people who worship God very differently from one another, and people who, in spite of all of these superficial differences, are worshiping the same God, the one true God, who created us all.

You probably don’t think too much about it but, as a relative newcomer to this community, let me just say how remarkable it is to see so many different iterations of Christianity worshiping together under one roof. In my experience, this simply isn’t the norm.

Perhaps what I see is the result of our living in the middle of nowhere, or the fact that we’re a small community and heavily reliant on each other just to get by. Both of those things are valid explanations, and at the same time, I think there’s something more at play here. I strongly believe that the friendships and relationships that you have forged, over the years and across all denominational lines, are the result of God working in this place and at this time.

The walls that have been torn down; the bridges that have been built by each and every one of you, are again, quite remarkable in our twenty-first century world, and we all give thanks to God for the faithfulness to the message of the Gospel seen in these actions.

Are we as a community perfect? No, we’re not. Are there times when we fall back into the sectarian differences that have caused major divisions in our town? Yes, those things still do occasionally happen. But, here’s the good news: God *is* at work here. Walls *have* been torn down and bridges *have* been built and, as a favorite hymn of mine notes, we have come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord.

So, that begs the question: What else can we, as followers of the risen Christ, do to continue to continue to tear down those walls and bridge our differences? What other things might we do to help bring about God’s Kingdom here on earth?

God is at work here and God’s spirit is blowing through our community, right now. Are we willing to let go of our fears, our anxieties, and our biases, in order to hear what God is calling us to do and to be? Siblings in Christ, what’s next? AMEN