November 10, 2013

Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21

*Telling Stories*

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The Message

“I lift you high in praise, my God, O my King! and I’ll bless your name into eternity. I’ll bless you every day, and keep it up from now to eternity. God is magnificent; he can never be praised enough. There are no boundaries to his greatness. Generation after generation stands in awe of your work; each one tells stories of your mighty acts. Your beauty and splendor have everyone talking; I compose songs on your wonders. Everything God does is right — the trademark on all his works is love. God’s there, listening for all who pray, for all who pray and mean it. He does what’s best for those who fear him — hears them call out, and saves them. God sticks by all who love him, but it’s all over for those who don’t. My mouth is filled with God’s praise. Let everything living bless him, bless his holy name from now to eternity!”

Today we celebrate 72 years of ministry in this place.  72 years of worship, 72 years of people learning and growing in their faith, 72 years of mission and making a difference in this world.  I first came to Greenland Hills as a student at Perkins School of Theology at SMU in 1999.  Dr. Deidre Palmer was my Christian Education Professor from Australia and she kept talking about her church, Greenland Hills.  So, later when I was in a worship class and we had to visit the same church for a month and do an analysis, I thought I could visit Greenland Hills.  So, when I found out I was going to be the pastor at this great church, thanks to the miracle of computers I found that report that I had written 14 years ago.  14 years ago I remarked that during my visit to Greenland Hills, I was amazed at the wide variety of people in the congregation as well as the children and infants that were present and active during the service.  There was a potluck lunch my first Sunday and 5 different people invited me to attend the lunch.  I found a community of faith that was loving and welcoming.

Last weekend on my exhausting but amazing 60 mile walk for the Komen 3-Day for the Cure, there were all of these grace-filled moments that kept reminding me of this place.  There were friends pushing a friend undergoing treatment for breast cancer in a wheelchair.  As we crossed a street all together, the police officer who was helping us to be safe, stepped in and pushed the wheelchair for them.  To him it was nothing but his duty, but to that group of tired women it was everything.  This is a church family that would do the same as that police officer.  Reaching out in love and concern for a stranger in need.  Another tradition of the Komen 3-Day for the Cure is to welcome the last walker into camp.  Hundreds of people line the path into camp and cheer on the last walker with every bit of love that they have.  Some people are limping, barely moving, ice wrapped around their legs but with every ounce of love they have they are celebrating the one who has come.  Every time I think of the celebration for the lost sheep that is found, the party that happens when we turn to God and are welcomed with loving arms.  Abundant love.  People who are strangers yesterday but are holding each other and crying together today.

When we worship together as a church family it is a celebration of our Christian identity and a celebration of our vocation.  We remember who we are as Christians and what we are here for.  When we get together for worship, we are remembering the story.  We are immersing ourselves in the Christian story.  I love Psalm 145:4 that says, “Generation after generation stands in awe of your work; each one tells stories of your mighty acts.”  We are telling and living the story of Jesus so that Jesus’ story becomes our story.  We remember our story so that we might be able to imagine our future.  When we worship together we are story telling, remembering the story of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Ruth, Esther, we are in their line.

I have been thinking this week about all of the people who have worshiped in this place, been baptized, shared in Communion, been married, or their lives have been celebrated in a funeral in this place.  In worship we come to remember who we are.

We gather to worship and then we are sent out to live as a disciple of Jesus.  We celebrate today the community of people who worships here, whether they are young or old; and we’re also celebrating the groups that use the church building during the week: some groups for Bible study and prayer, some for singing and making music as well as community groups and associations.  God has created each individual uniquely in God’s own image and everyone has different gifts and talents. And - just like the ingredients in a recipe - we all bring different things into this community.  We also remember the people who came before us. We remember the people who founded this family of faith 72 years ago and we remember the people who built this building 67 years ago in 1946.  I thank God for the life, the work, and the witness of those people. We remember how they lived and the love and the concern they showed to us, and we acknowledge all of that before God.  Remembering our mothers and fathers in faith can also help us to have a touchstone, an example of Christian living.

We have mentioned the people who are part of our community today. And we have mentioned the people who have come before us. But we have not mentioned the people who will come after us.  In 1999 when I visited Greenland Hills I took notes of Kathleen Baskin’s sermon and she said these words, “the Church is called to be accessible to lead the faithful to a God that is right there for us.”  She ended her sermon by saying “we are called to make accessible to others God’s love.”

My prayer is that as we go forward into what is for us a new year, that the Spirit of Christ will go with us and give us strength to continue to be a community who are forgiving and forgiven.  May the Spirit open our eyes and our ears to the work of God in our lives and in the world and help us to respond as we are called. I make this prayer in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.