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**First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood**  
**Sunday, July 25, 2021**

***John 6:1-21***

*After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'*

*When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*

*When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.' Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.*

***Ephesians 3:14-21***

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.*

It is my joy to be with you all this morning. And thank you, Bill, for your kind introduction, I don't feel the need to repeat who I am. It was sort of shocking to see my name out on that sign on the front road over there. It feels a little risky to me this morning. I woke up to a printer with no ink. I am still in my boot, even though I dutifully brought dress shoes with me to change into, except I brought along two left dress shoes. So, we'll just see how the sermon goes.

I grew up in St. Louis, and upon completing seminary, I was in the job search, and of course, I was looking at

churches throughout the whole of the Midwest and Kirkwood. This church was kind enough to bring me down for an interview. It's one of my earliest memories of First Presbyterian Kirkwood. And it's some, now, 26 years ago that I was here, and I arrived. Oh, it was exciting as only you can be at 26 and interviewing for your first pastoral job post-seminary. And it was probably for an associate pastor of youth and family something or another at the time.

And anyway, so I arrived here and a lovely gentleman was giving me a tour of the building. I really have no idea what his name is. My husband is here with me. He will assure you that I have no memory of this man's name. But I remember precisely the moment when I knew I would not be offered this position. And it involves this pulpit. You want to hear about it?

So anyway, we had come into the sanctuary - and it's just glorious, just lovely - and the gentleman who was showing me around, he's like, "Climb up into the pulpit," and friends, this is a significant pulpit. It's a little daunting. Not every Presbyterian sanctuary has this kind of pulpit. And so, I did. And it's lovely and very nice. And I could capture the view. And then this man said to me, "Okay, go ahead and preach." I thought he was joking. He wasn't joking. And I stammered something and kind of hemmed and hawed and said, "I just showed up for an interview. I'm not ready." And then finally, something like, "Oh, Jesus loves you." He was not impressed. And I knew at that moment, as I looked at his disappointed face, I would not be offered the job. So here I am. I'm back, 26 years later, back up in this magnificent pulpit, and I am here to tell you once again, Jesus loves you. Let's see how this goes.

One of the great things about my new role on your presbytery's staff is that I now have the opportunity, especially since, well, things are a little safer, I'm able to get back out into churches and be present with you all. And in the last several weeks, including today, I have been preaching regularly. And I thought to myself in June when these opportunities were lining themselves up in July and then a little bit into August, I took a look at the lectionary readings and I saw that, oh, Ephesians is up for the next seven weeks. Well, maybe if I sink my teeth into one book, that'll kind of give me some direction over the course of these different preaching moments that I have. And that's how I came to the book of Ephesians today.

If you've not been reading along these last few weeks with Ephesians in brief, just to orient you all a little bit, the first week's reading focused on God's freely given gift of grace. That gift we do not merit, nor can we earn. The second week, the reading focused on how we are all chosen by God. The barriers between us are torn down and continue to be torn down even when we work really, really hard to build them back up again. And in this week's passage, the author of the letter reminds us to be rooted and grounded in love. And he begins for this reason. Well, what's the reason? The author spends the first part of the letter explaining the reason. Really, it's because of the immeasurable grace of God because, in that grace, all are welcomed. All are included. All of us. Everyone. And for the author, all means all. Some of the rest of them had to struggle with it--surely not the Gentiles, they said, and surely not pagans, surely not enemies, surely not those whose lives are just way too different from ours, who don't speak our language, who don't dress like we do, think like we do, work like we do, look like we do. Surely not them. No, the author writes. All means all. And for this reason, I fall to my knees in awe of God. Love is to ground everything we do as it is the root of our faith.

First Presbyterian Church, Kirkwood, you are in the midst of a great transition, retirements, interims arriving, pastor nominating committees being organized, mission studies to be done. You and your leadership are doing hard work. Transitions, as you all know, are also anxious times. They can be stressful. You can feel discouraged in these moments because it can all get a little overwhelming. And when under stress, we good loving people have been known-- we've been known, when we're really honest with ourselves, to occasionally lose it. Otherwise, really good people find alarming and obnoxious things coming out of their mouths and you don't know where it's coming from. But it's coming from the stress and the anxiety around change and transition and wondering about the future and what the future holds for us and where will we go and what will it look like, but I liked what it was. We don't mean to. It just happens. The stress gets the better of us, the second-guessing out in the parking lot gets the best of us, the good memories of days gone by come to us and our nostalgia gets the best

of us. And how do we navigate these kinds of anxious waters? We navigate them grounded and rooted in love.

What I know about First Presbyterian Church is that your roots are strong. Your roots are strong, you have long been grounded in the love of Christ. For you who are gardeners out there, you know that the root system is the way in which trees and plants absorb the nutrients they need to grow and live. The roots, strengthen the trunk that supports the crown, that provides the shade for flowers. Roots need to be grounded in rich soil in order to thrive. And love is the fertile soil where our faith is rooted. And it is this love that grounds and guides the way we live our faith. This love in which our faith in our very lives is rooted and grounded is not some fanciful pie in the sky or emotional love. It is the love of Christ that passes all human knowledge. It is not an intellectual discussion of love, but an experience of love. It is the kind of love that God gave to us in Christ. It is love that comes from grace and not merit, a love that gives grace to others, a love that prompts compassion and justice for others, a love that is enduring. It rarely makes sense to a world based on a market economy where value and worth are determined by what one does or what one earns. It is not a love based on bias or personal preference. This love is based on God's grace economy and surpasses any human construct. This is the kind of love that roots, grounds, and sustains our faith. This is the love which will sustain First Presbyterian Church in this upcoming season of transition. But no, but no, it's not always an easy love.

It takes time to learn to live that life of love. It takes our effort. It takes moving forward and falling back. It takes success and failure to learn to live a life of love. We have to rock the vehicle back and forth in order to break free of the rut we find ourselves in from time to time. We are being rooted and grounded in love. Being rooted, and yet we're not done. As soon as we think we are done, as soon as we think we've got it, we've lost it. Hold on to the price to dwell within. We were filled with that which keeps us going, which pushes us to go further, to go deeper, and there is the commitment. A new way of living, of being, of loving. The author calls it being filled with all the fullness of God. Blessing and possibility and suffering and hurt too.

God doesn't call us to an easy life, but a full life, a deep life, a life that struggles with how to love, but driven by the certainty that loving is a better way to live, even if we don't always know how, it's going to work out. Not knowing that's a tough thing, I personally like certainty, I like a plan, I like to know what's happening and give me a list and let me follow a calendar. Not knowing is not an easy place to be, but not knowing is also okay because there is one who does know. And while our vision is limited, we can trust in the one who sees more and can work what seems like miracles every day. Far more than all we can ask or imagine because we don't know how to ask or imagine. We'll just love together. That's the other important secret of this passage. All of the use in the passage are plural. We do this better together.

This learning to love thing, this living in hope thing, this being filled with all the fullness thing, we do it, we know it, we experience it better together the body of Christ. I believe that's worthy of the doxology. Now to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. May God bless you and keep you and guide you. Place your trust that the way will be made known to you. Place your trust in God and love one another, love one another, and all will come to place. Amen.