

Trinity Presbyterian Church, Ottawa

August 1, 2021

“I’ve been meaning to ask...how did we get here?”

For the next few weeks, I’ll be working with a sermon series based on the prompt, “I’ve been meaning to ask...” This series, developed by a really beautiful liturgical art group called Sanctified Art, started asking themselves these questions during the pandemic: “How can we listen to one another? How do we find connection despite distance? How do we create space for compassionate dialogue and for seeking the holy in one another?” I imagine that many of you have asked yourselves similar questions over the past year as well...I must admit that when I agreed to preach again back in May, I imagined that we would be in another place as a world and as a country, in August-that we could be asking ourselves different questions, adjusting to a new reality, and looking ahead to a fresh new season. After all, by now many of us are fully vaccinated, many of us have been able to travel and not only visit, but hug and embrace our loved ones without fear, and over the past few months, glimpses of normality have provided us rest, refreshment, and renewed hope. And yet, we still find ourselves with a long road ahead of us. The news coming out about the Delta variant and its contagiousness is troublesome, especially as we look ahead at the school year beginning again soon. And in the last months, due to Covid or other reasons, we continue to lose family members, friends, and former church members and looking around, we see that loved ones are critically ill. As a country, news about the remains discovered at residential schools has shocked and appalled us, shaking our sense of national identity. Amid continued grief, collective trauma, upheaval, and uncertainty, sometimes I wake up and wonder, how did we get here? And it’s not just a rhetorical question anymore-I really want an answer.

With so many concerns at the forefront of our minds, what can this space, this community offer us? What stories in scripture speak to these challenges in our lives? What does the Church have to say about building relationships? How do we foster and model genuine and authentic connection in this socially distant season?

How do we get to know one another—truly and deeply? We are living through an unprecedented season—one that requires reserves of resilience, courage, and patience that we have perhaps never had to tap into to this extent before. How can we show up for each other during this time? While the challenges of becoming a beloved community to one another are endless, the questions we’ll explore over the next few weeks are simple. All courageous conversations begin with simple questions and the desire to truly listen. This prompt, "I've been meaning to ask..." invites intentionality, warmth, curiosity, and consideration. At its root, this question also implies the following statements: "I've been thinking about you and I've been wanting to check in... You've been on my mind... I haven't known how to have this conversation, but I'm getting started with a question." "I've been meaning to ask..." implies intention and interest. However, it also hints at the sensitivity that vulnerability invites. So, my hope for you during this series is that you will dig deep. I pray you will use these guiding questions to better know the people you sit next to in these virtual pews each week, as well as those you may have never spoken with before. I am confident the kingdom of God looks like deep, meaningful connection.

Next week, I'll pose the question "Where are you from?" But before we reflect on the diversity and the uniqueness of where we come from, I think it's helpful to establish some common ground. We must go back to the source and take stock of what binds us together. Perhaps there we can find the source of our common identity and recognize that despite our differences in ideas, hopes, and struggles, we have a shared identity and a common purpose. When I think about the book of Genesis, and particularly the creation story, I can't help but jump to the conclusion of Adam and Eve's time in Eden. And as I think about all that we are going through right now—all the pain, all the chaos, all the suffering and I wonder, how did we get here, I must admit that I'm not terribly surprised. I can't help but think back to Adam and Eve and their original blunder that got them, and consequently all of humanity, expelled from paradise. How did we get here? Friends, it seems we've been here, all the time. Making mistakes, avoiding responsibility, hoping to take shortcuts, and blaming others from the very, very

beginning. And yet, reading this passage again helped me return to the time before the fall. Back to the creation and design of this earth, which we are privileged to still occupy. As we read this beautiful account of creation-we see the thoughtfulness, the intentionality, and the purposeful design with which God crafts the earth and the heavens. Streams rise from the earth to water the face of the ground, and God breaths divine life into a living, breathing being. Out of the ground God creates trees that are pleasant to the sight and good for food, as well as a source of knowledge. And in this rich and fertile place, at the crossing of four branches of a powerful river that waters the garden, God places this first human being. In Eden, the man will till the garden and keep it. In this account, we see that Adam *comes from the land, is sustained by the land, and serves the land*. In this divine design, the natural creation and humanity are interdependent, they need each other-they have been given the tools and the setting to survive, but they can't thrive without each other. Not unlike Adam and Eve, we also come from this land, are sustained by it, and we must recommit to serving and caring for it-so that it will survive. For me, when all is complicated and overwhelming, like it has been this last year, it helps for me to go back to the basics-the foundation of who I am and how I got here. Each one of us is God's beloved creation-we are God's and God is ours. The God who banished Adam and Eve from paradise never abandoned us-this is the same benevolent, loving creator who formed the earth with us-with all our needs-in mind. Like Adam, we may fall short, all the time and in all kinds of ways, in upholding our God given purpose. There is mutuality and interdependence, symbiosis, in the way God created the heavens and the earth. That same pattern is true of the human family as well-we need each other. Not just when we are thriving and able to be together out there in the world, but when we are floundering and alone, feeling like the only person on the planet going through whatever we are going through. Like our relationship to the land, we have a similar relationship with each other. Separated by distance, isolation, and our own silos of experience this year, it may be hard to remember and to honor that-especially as it takes more intentional efforts to do so. But we too come from each other, we are sustained by each other, and we must serve each other not only to thrive, but to survive.

May this series help us to behold each other as images of the divine. May it help us strengthen our capacity for empathy and compassion. May it remind us of the power of asking unassuming questions. May it show us that courage is rooted in the heart. Through vulnerability and authenticity, may our courageous conversations lead us to glimpse hope, joy, and beauty—and to become the community God created us to be.