

Summerland United Church

June 9th

Tending the New Creation: Expanding Kinship

Threshold

Tending a new creation may involve the creation or expansion of our concepts of “family.” In the scripture Jesus confirms that kinship in God’s Realm can go beyond bloodlines. We can re-create family in so many ways, whether we grew up with a family of origin that offered us support or did not. Who is our kin? All those who seek to live together in love!

Scripture: Mark 3:20-35

Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth metaphor or story, listen for the meaning they hold for you on this day. A Reading from the Book of Mark, Chapter 3, verses 20- 35

²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” ²³ And he called them to him and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸ “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin”— ³⁰ for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers^[a] are outside asking for you.” ³³ And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

One: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

All: Thanks be to God.

Selection from the Song of Faith: See Insert

This statement of faith seeks to provide a verbal picture of what The United Church of Canada understands its faith to be in its current historical, political, social, and theological context at the beginning of the 21st century. It is also a means of ongoing reflection and

an invitation for the church to live out its convictions in relation to the world in which we live.

This is not a statement for all time but for our time. In as much as the Spirit keeps faith with us, we can express our understanding of the Holy with confidence. And in as much as the Spirit is vast and wild, we recognize that our understanding of the Holy is always partial and limited. Nonetheless we have faith, and this statement collects the meaning of our song.

Anne: We are each given particular gifts of the Spirit.

**Kathleen: For the sake of the world,
God calls all followers of Jesus to Christian ministry.
In the church,
some are called to specific ministries of leadership,
both lay and ordered;
some witness to the good news;**

Anne: some uphold the art of worship;
some comfort the grieving and guide the wandering;

**Kathleen: some build up the community of wisdom;
some stand with the oppressed and work for justice.**

Anne: To embody God's love in the world,
the work of the church requires the ministry and discipleship
of all believers.

Reflection: Expanding Kinship. After my Ordination I went camping along the Similkameen river near Cawston. It was a time away from everything the chance for me to catch my breath after this long journey towards ordination. (Thank you for providing me with the time off to have this rest).

As I walked along the banks of the river, first I noticed deer tracks in the muddy sand, but then I started to notice all the rocks piled up making the banks and berms holding the edges of the river. Most of the rocks were dark navy blue or charcoal grey, some were white with black speckles, like Dalmatian puppies, and in and among these stones were pink ones, purple ones, Burgandy and even orange ones. Dozens of different shades and colours, all jumbled together, smooth and rough edged, cracked, striped, but each of them strong and by being assembled together created this structure holding the river to its course.

As I was thinking about this I remembered the words from one of the speakers at the PMRC AGM, a woman with indigenous and Ukrainian heritage Patty Krawec, who

talked about how in her heritage rocks and stones are their ancestors. They recognize and understand the ancient age of the earth and value the stories of strength and endurance and Perseverance that stones carry.

During the Q&A of Patty's session with us, a person stood up and shared her thinking about our ancient stories, our ancient ancestors. She commented that in our Jewish and Christian story of creation we too come from earth, from the Adamah, which means of the earth. In the first creation story, Adamah is a single being, genderless, because as a singular being why would you need a gender. But this being is lonely, so God divides the being into two beings – not to create a binary, and either or, but to create duality, relationship, connection and community.

As a being divided into duality, both sides, both beings would and do mirror the other, carry elements of the other, remaining connected, yet separate.

So in this way, to quote my friend at the AGM: the first human being was Transgender. - Trans means change, movement, and that's what the first being did it changed, it transitioned from singular to plural. Alone to together.

We hear in our scripture story today that Jesus rejects his blood family in favor of his spiritual family. He's come back to his home and spoken about inclusivity and the sharing of all with those who have nothing. He's insisted that healing can happen on the Sabbath and that everyone is loved by God. And because of these things his family think he's gone mad. They've seen him challenge authority and the status quo, said – hey son, don't make waves, you'll get us all in trouble.

Fair. They're scared, just previously in this chapter Jesus heals a person with a withered hand in the synagogue, on the sabbath and the Pharisees are conspiring to destroy him. The fear of retribution is real, for the powers that be to not appreciate being challenged.

But Jesus responds with love, not fear, saying my family are the people who are scared, but willing to do the work anyway. He's saying if you can't accept me for who I am and what I've called to be in this world, then we can't be family.

Sometimes, if blood family are not able to accept your life, your identity and cannot help you live into the fullness of your humanity, you should reject them.

In our Song of Faith we heard that we are all given particular gifts of the Spirit, we are all called to different ways of living our these gifts in the world. Leadership, witness, comforting, building up community, standing for justice – just to mention a few. There are plenty of others. We all have things that we're good at and things were not.

Turns out – I'm a pretty good minister, but ya know what? I'm a terrible singer. I can knit, but I can't fix a car. So thank goodness we have Kathleen and others here who can

sing! And thank goodness there are people in the world who can tell me why the car is making that strange wiring noise.

The gifts given by spirit are a part of our identity, who we are at the core of our being. We, as people of God are called to live into that core identity, and to see and care for the identities of others.

We hear in the scripture passage Jesus say, *Whoever does god's will is my family*. And in the song of faith, we hear God's will is to recognize the gifts of the spirit within each of us and that by honouring these gifts we embody God's love in the world. And I go back to thinking about the rocks on the bank of the Similkameen river. All the colours, sizes, shapes, all the eons of scrapping along together building up banks, smoothing out each others rough edges, holding together and occasionally letting go. The river flows and changes, as the rocks move and change as well, but always assembling with strength, and endurance. Each rock needs the other to hold together. They're all different, but somehow they fit together and make it all work.

Communion:

One: The Holy One be with you.

All: And also with you.

Open your hearts to the One who is Love.

We open our hearts to you, O God.

Let us give thanks to God, our Creator.

For the courage of the Holy that lives in us, we give thanks.

Bold and Beloved One, throughout history you have revealed yourself to us in ways that surprise and disrupt.

You shocked the world when you came to be with us as a vulnerable baby born into a family fleeing political persecution.

Though the scandal of your embodiment in Jesus led to crucifixion, still your Spirit of New Life is birthed anew among the marginalized.

You live among us today:

In the lives of black trans women whose experiences of violence are dismissed and ignored.

Among bisexual people living with HIV/AIDS.

As babies born into the care of lesbian women.

You wander school halls as trans children and navigate the streets as queer couples walking hand-in-hand.

You come to us as 2sLGBTQIA+ youth with no homes because their families to do not accept them.

You are embodied by Two-Spirit people, still fighting against the impacts of colonization, erasure, and stolen land.

At times, we are confused by your expression in humanity. You take on flesh in people, places, and ideas we have been taught to deny or scorn. We see the ways you as a human among us are dehumanized. And so we struggle. Hearts harden. and fear overrides hospitality.

But still, your love persists. Through beauty, compassion, and truth, you lure us into laying down our need to control. You move us. Free us. Embrace us.

By your grace, we are brought into the sacred labours of justice and transformation. We become free in Christ to reject all evil and oppression.

Like those who gathered with Jesus on the night of his arrest, we come in need of grace. After feasting with his companions, Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to all of them and said:

“This is my body which is given for you.
Take, eat, and remember me.”

After the supper, he did the same with the cup, saying:
“This is a symbol of the new covenant. Drink in remembrance of me.”

In remembering the life of Jesus, we remember what he showed us:

The love of God is public.

The love of God is intentional.

The love of God is explicit.

And so we pray, pour out your Spirit on this bread and this cup, O God. Through these gifts, open our hearts to encounters with Christ in the strange and the ordinary. May the bread of life and the cup of blessing strengthen us in our courage to live as Jesus lived. Amen.

Before us are the simple gifts that nourish us, body, heart and soul:

The Bread of Life and

The Cup of Blessing

Prayer after Communion

All: Nourishing One,
Your gifts renew us in body, spirit, and mind.
Through this taste of love,
may the Spirit send us with a faith that is brave.
Let no institution or narrow thinking hold us back;
make us people who boldly pursue collective justice
and tend gently to the world's pain. Amen.