

Arden Pastoral Charge

June 6, 2021:

Colouring Outside the Lines

Rev. Cheryl McMurray

Jesus said: "When two or three are gathered in my name, I am there."

Today we gather in body and Spirit, and Christ is here.



Gathering Prayer:

"Morning has broken, loving God

– the dawn of light has scattered the long darkness of night.

Help us to carry into this day the sure knowledge of your presence,
of your forgiveness, of your steadfast love,
and of our standing as your beloved children.

Jesus said, 'Anyone who does the will of God is my family.'

May we do your will in all our daily interactions,
so that your grace extends to more and more people.

We begin this day, Loving God, with thanksgiving and praise."¹ Amen.

Scripture: Our scripture this morning is from early in the Gospel of Mark. News of Jesus' healings and casting out of demons and his teachings have preceded him. The news is problematic for the religious scholars who have come from Jerusalem to disparage and discredit him, and for his family who have come worried about his state of mind, and ready to intervene and take charge of him.

¹ Feasting on the Word: Worship Companion, Year B, Vol 2, 29 (adapted CMM).

Reading Mark 3: 20 - 35 from the Inclusive Bible

Then Jesus went home, and again such a crowd gathered that he and the disciples were unable even to eat a meal. When Jesus' relatives heard of this, they went out to take charge of him, thinking that he had lost his mind.

The religious scholars who had come down from Jerusalem said of Jesus, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out demons through the ruler of demons."

Summoning them, Jesus spoke in parables: "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a realm is torn by civil strife, it cannot last. If a household is divided according to loyalties, it will not survive. Similarly, if Satan has suffered mutiny in the ranks and is torn by dissension, the Devil is finished and cannot endure. No attacker can enter a stronghold unless the defender is first put under restraint. Only then can the attacker plunder the stronghold. The truth is, every sin and all the blasphemy the people utter will be forgiven, but those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness. They are guilty of an eternal sin."

Jesus spoke all this because the religious scholars had said, "His is possessed by an unclean spirit."

Jesus' mother and brothers arrived and sent in a message asking for him. A crowd was sitting around Jesus, and they said to him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

Jesus replied, "Who is my mother? Who is my family?" And looking around at everyone there, Jesus said, "This is my family! Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my sister, my brother, my mother."

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Thoughts Along the Way:

Gordon Light is a deacon and priest with the Anglican Church. He is also a musician and hymn writer. You may recognize some of his works: the Palm Sunday hymn - He Came Riding On a Donkey²; the Pentecost hymn - She Comes Sailing on the Wind³; discipleship hymns like Come Touch Our Hearts⁴, and Draw the Circle Wide⁵. In 1995 Gordon Light published a hymn titled, My Love Colours Outside the Lines⁶. Take a look for it on youtube.

“My love colours outside the lines,
exploring paths that few could ever find;
and takes me into places where I’ve never been before,
and opens doors to worlds outside the lines.

My Lord colours outside the lines,
turns wounds to blessings, water into wine;
and takes me into places where I’ve never been before
and opens doors to worlds outside the lines.

My soul longs to colour outside the lines,
tear back the curtains, sun, come in and shine;
I want to walk beyond the boundaries where I’ve never been before,
throw open doors to worlds outside the lines.

We’ll never walk on water if we’re not prepared to drown,
body and soul need a soaking from time to time.
And we’ll never move the gravestones if we’re not prepared to die,
and realize there are worlds outside the lines.”⁷

² Voices United 124

³ Voices United 380

⁴ More Voices 12

⁵ More Voices 145

⁶ More Voices 138

⁷ Gordon Light, My Love Colours Outside the Lines, More Voices 138.

This quickly became one of my favourite hymns – one of the favourites of me and several of my friends in my home church. It was not however, one of the favourites of some of the other parishioners in my home church. I remember a conversation where a more mature lady than myself, one who was not as enamored of this hymn, asked why I liked it. What did I see in it that she didn't?

As I recall, I talked about what 'colouring outside the lines' meant to me. I worked with families and children then – many with special needs in some form or another. Colouring outside the lines was something many of those children did – both literally and figuratively. Their developmental paths were not typical. Their emotional and behavioural needs were not typical. What lay ahead for them and their families in terms of expectations for school and friends and their long term futures, would not be typical. Colouring outside the lines was and would continue to be their norm – their normal. They were living in worlds outside the lines.

As I came to discern that my own future was going to change course, from the work that I loved with families and children - to going back to school for a Masters of Divinity degree - to entering the maze of ministerial experiences that leads to ordination, I also appreciated in another way what colouring outside the lines meant for me.

“My love colours outside the lines,
exploring paths that few could ever find;
and takes me into places where I've never been before,
and opens doors to worlds outside the lines.

Exploring paths that few could ever find, taking me into places where I'd never been before, took me to the GO station in Whitby, to the subway between Union and Museum stations, and to Emmanuel College. Those paths took me to Michigan and Taiwan for theological conferences. Those paths brought me to the communities of Arden and Henderson and Mountain Grove. Those paths opened doors to your world, and to opportunities to share love and worship and work and fellowship as brothers and sisters to Christ and members of the family of God.

And I acknowledge and appreciate and offer profound gratitude to Jesus, because it was he who laid down those paths to explore, and who opened those doors.

Grammarist.com offers this definition to ‘what does colour outside the lines mean?’ “To colour outside the lines is an idiom that means to not follow the rules, to think creatively, to behave in an unconventional manner.”⁸ That describes Jesus quite well, don’t you think? Even though it is in the early days of Jesus’ ministry, according to the Gospel of Mark, he has demonstrated that he is not following the rules, that he is thinking creatively, and definitely behaving in an unconventional manner.

He has left his family, something quite unusual for the times, as family was central to the Jewish faith. Family units were large and “included father, mother or mothers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters (until their marriage), grandparents, and other kinsmen, as well as servants”⁹ if there were some. Family lived together, worked together, earned together, thrived or barely survived together. Marriage and children were the norm; after all the earliest stories of the scriptures commanded the Hebrew people to be fruitful and multiply. Jesus has not married or fathered children, and he has left his family. He has called men to him, called them to leave their families, and to follow him and travel with him, god knows where and for how long. He has driven out impure and unclean spirits, and healed all manner of illness. He has conspicuously chosen to dine with undesirables. He has broken the laws of the Sabbath, and justified breaking those laws by interpreting the Hebrew scriptures in a way not done before – unconventionally.

This day finds him in the midst of a crowd, opposite religious scholars from Jerusalem, who have accused him of being possessed by a demon. He confronts them and refutes their accusation quite handily and with some heat in his voice. Then, he is told his family has come looking for him. And by all appearances, he turns that heat towards them. *‘Who is my mother? Who is my family?’*

⁸ <https://grammarist.com/idiom/colour-outside-the-lines>

⁹ The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible E-J, Family, 238.

I remember my New Testament professor at Emmanuel suggesting that there were times when Jesus was nothing but a mean S-O-B. This was one of those times. Maybe. See, I don't read this as disrespect to his earthly family, but rather as Jesus redefining family. There is an old saying that we can choose our friends, but we can't choose our family. The fact of the matter is, we – all of you in these communities of Arden and Henderson and Mountain Grove, and all of you who are joining us online from wherever you are, and me; we have, if only for the time of this recording, we have chosen each other to be family. United in worship. Those who seek the will of God, and those who do the will of God.

This redefinition is the beginning of a wave of inclusion that welcomed all. One biblical scholar writes that “it is an odd feature of Jesus’ ministry that he is open to everybody: Jews, Gentiles, the poor, the demented, the sick, working class, women, tax collectors, sexual outcasts.”¹⁰ Jesus’ redefining family and his radical welcome and inclusion continues throughout his ministry according to the Gospel of Mark. In 9: 37 he says, *‘Whoever welcomes a child such as this for my sake welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the One who sent me.’* (Mark 9: 37). Just a few verses later he says, *‘Anyone who is not against us is with us.’* (Mark 9: 40).

Whew! That’s unconventional even for today. In fact, that could be considered a radical departure from today’s societal norms. Not the way many think. After all, there is much that divides us – race and culture and religion and language... But perhaps you’ve seen the memes circulating where Jesus is seated amongst a crowd saying, ‘A new command I give you, to love one another.’ Depending on the meme, a voice in the crowd asks, ‘But what if they are immigrants?’ or ‘What if they are gay?’ or ‘What if they are Muslim?’ or ‘What if we disagree about essential doctrine?’ Jesus simply replies, ‘Lets start over. A new command I give you, to love one another.’

‘Who is my family?’ And looking around at everyone there, Jesus said, ‘This is my family! Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my sister, my brother, my mother.’

¹⁰ Wendy Farley, Theological Perspective, Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol 3, 118.

This is Jesus, colouring outside the lines, turning wounds to blessings, water into wine. Taking us into places where we've never been before, and opening doors to worlds outside the lines.

Amen.

Prayers of the People

Loving God,

We confess that our weakness, our fear, and our wanting often intrude on our desire to do your will, and to be the sisters and brothers of Christ, to be family to each and all who call on your name.

Forgive us we pray, and strengthen us to be about your work in our world, Whatever that work looks like.

Loving God,

We pray for the needs of all during this time

– for health, for family, for food and shelter, for financial security, for justice, and for equality.

We pray for wisdom for leaders of nations.

We pray for courage and comfort for medical staff, and for front line and essential service workers.

We pray for patience as we and our communities struggle with the conditions set upon us because of COVID-19.

We pray for those who are ill, in body and mind and spirit,

and for loved ones who cannot be close enough to care for or comfort them.

We pray for all who have asked for our prayers...

We pray for all who have no one to pray for them...

We pray especially for those near and dear to our hearts.....

“Where hope has grown tired and thin, lift our sights,
so that we may see hope beyond hope, life beyond death,
and you, lifted up before us.

We pray all this in the name of Christ who gave himself for our sake,”¹¹
To our Mother of Wisdom and our Father...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

We give thanks to God for blessings and gifts given. We, in turn, offer our gifts of time, talent and treasure to God. Your gifts can be sent to June Hughes for Arden United Church, Sheila Deline for Henderson United Church, or Sharon MacMunn for Mountain Grove United Church. You can also visit our website – www.ardenpastoralcharge.ca – where you will find a ‘Donate’ button.

On behalf of the congregations of Arden, Henderson and Mountain Grove, I do want to thank you for your ongoing financial contributions.

Benediction:

Christ calls us his family,
We are wanted and loved.

And now, may the grace of Christ attend you,
the love of God surround you,
and the Holy Spirit keep you. Amen.

¹¹ Feasting on the Word: Worship Companion, Year A, Vol 1, 103.