

Affirming Sunday 2019 Service

May 5, 2019

Offered by the people of Calvary United Church, Prince Albert, SK to all of Living Skies

Regional Council

Contents: Order of Service; children's time; sermon.

Land Acknowledgment: *This will vary depending on your location.*

HYMN: VU 395 Come in, come in and sit down

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: God, the Creator, is with us this day.

All: And so we gather in the name of the One who made the sun and the moon, the One who made the oceans waves and the prairie wind. The One, who made each of us, and who calls us to this place just as we are.

Sing: VU 372 "Though I may Speak" vs 1

One: Christ, the One who taught of a loving God, is with us this day.

All: And it is in the shelter of God's love that we gather. May this time be one brushed with hope, peace, and acceptance. As we celebrate this Affirming Ministry Sunday, we gather knowing that it is in celebrating our great diversity that God's love is most clearly known.

Sing: VU 372 "Though I may Speak" vs 2

One: Spirit, the Power that binds us together in perfect harmony, is with us this day.

All: And bound by the love of God we rejoice and lift our prayers. For here, though we are all so very different, we are united, we belong, we may find the space our souls need to rest in the Creator and sing out to the Holy One.

Sing "Though I may Speak" vs 3

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**God of Life, you are the one who paints rainbows in the sky,
you fill the earth with vibrant and varied creatures,
and make humanity a part of your Holy Covenant.**

**It is You who calls us to this time of worship today
and so we come before You in hope.**

We rejoice that here all people are free to come as they are.

**We give thanks that in the space love is love,
mercy is free,
and hope is restored.**

**And yet we know we often fail,
as individuals
and as a church.**

**Forgives us those times we have turned people away,
Forgive us when we have intentionally made people feel unwelcome in our
presence, by our misuse of preferred pronouns, by letting homophobic,
transphobic, racist, ageist, sexist words go unchallenged. Forgive us for
judging others, condemning others, hurting others,
and fill us with the courage we need to not only begin this journey of
affirmation
but to embrace it into our everyday living
that we might draw our circle ever wider.**

Silent prayers of confession

ASSURANCE OF GRACE

**One: God, who calls us forward on this road, touches us with Grace that we
might spread peace and hope to others as we travel.**

**All: Accepting God's mercy fills us with the assurance that we are Beloved,
Divinely Created, and Blessed by the Holy One. Accepting God's mercy
empowers us to share this truth with all we meet. Thanks be to God!**

DOXOLOGY: Halle halle halle

PASSING OF THE PEACE

CONGREGATIONAL FAMILY TIME

HYMN: MV 141 "We Are All One People"

STORY: *Get Your Rainbow On! (see notes below)*

HYMN: MV 141 "We Are All One People"

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD

Scriptures

Genesis 9:12-13

Psalm 36

Colossians 3:12-15

REFLECTION: "Perfect Harmony" (see Below)

OUR RESPONSE TO THE WORD

NEW CREED VU 918

OUR OFFERING:

OFFERTORY HYMN: 538 for the gift of creation

PRAYER OF DEDICATION ~

Through the many gifts we are given, may we use all that we are and all that we have to grow in acceptance, mercy, and love. In the Spirit we present these gifts and in Christ's name we pray God's blessing upon them.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God our Creator, by your very essence we are called into relationship. As we gather our prayers before you this morning we praise you. We rejoice in the vastness of your creation. The beauty we see all around us speaks to the beauty we are called to see in each other. Help us take conscious care of this planet.
God Hear our prayer

Response MV 62 "There is room for all in the Shelter of God's love"

Christ our Redeemer, your life giving call to love each other as you have loved us empowers us. Help us as we walk this road of life together that we might truly live in your love. We pray today for all those places around the world where love, compassion, kindness, patience and meekness are seen as weaknesses rather than strengths. We pray for the world's leaders and ask that you would fill them with integrity and the willingness to speak truth. We pray for *(add current world issues from this week.)* Christ hear our prayer.

Response MV 62 "There is room for all in the Shelter of God's love"

Spirit, our Sustainer...it is your power that dances among us this morning. As we commit ourselves to this Affirming Journey we ask that you would continue to guide and inspire this church and all those who walk with us. We pray for those who have been shunned, hated and rejected because of their gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, age, religion, class, socio-economic place in the world. We pray for those who are allies. We pray also this day loving God for everyone who needs your healing touch in their lives. We pray for all those in hospital and long term care. We pray for those who long for healing of their minds and spirits. We pray for those who walk in grief and sorrow. We remember especially *(name people who have requested prayers)* And so many more whom we name in our hearts...*(silent prayers)*. Spirit hear our prayer

Response MV 62 "There is room for all in the Shelter of God's love"

All this and so much more we lift up to you loving God, calling you by the name that feels most like home to us, we say the words you taught us we love to hear...

Our father/mother/creator/God...

THE SENDING FORTH

HYMN: MV 165 "There is a time"

COMMISSIONING –

One: The Journey is long...

All: Together we will travel; together we will make our way.

One: The road is winding...

All: Together we will explore the twists and turns; together we will follow where the God of Love is leading us.

One: It will not be easy...

All: Together we will find the courage we need to face the challenges ahead; together we dance beneath God's rainbow sharing the Good News that all are Chosen and Beloved.

One: Amen

All: Amen!

BENEDICTION HYMN: VU 209 "Go Make a Difference" vs 1 & 3

Children's Time

Ahead of time fill a box or basket with random rainbow things (hats, scarves, glasses, wigs, necklaces, etc) and tuck it behind the communion table or pulpit. Have a youth or adult with the box to help kids who need it when they go to the box

Meet the kids at the front and show them a picture of rainbow (maybe you have rainbow things in church already...point them out). Ask the kids what they like about rainbows. Ask what would it be like if a rainbow only had one colour...would they be as pretty? Reflect on the idea that what makes rainbows breathtaking is how all the colours work together to create a beautiful thing. Not one of the colours is better than another...although you may prefer one more than another and that's ok. You may feel red is your favourite but that does not mean blue has less value or that another person liking blue is wrong.

Talk about how we are like a rainbow. God has made everyone of us all and we are all wonderfully different. No one has more or less value than anyone else. And while lovely on our own, when we are together as people from all walks of life, of all ages, genders, gender identities, sexual orientations, classes, abilities, racial and ethnic identities, and bring all of our differences, or skills, our joys, or talents together, we create an amazing and beautiful rainbow.

Share with them something that makes you different or unique...then ask one of the kids to share something about themselves that make them different or special...when they do have them go to the rainbow box and pick out an item. Have all the kids do this until you've created an amazing rainbow people. At the end have someone take a photo of you all.

Colossians 3:12-15 "Perfect Harmony"Rev. Nora Vedress

Affirming Ministry Celebration

Written for our Affirming Celebration held on Sunday June 10 2018

Calvary United Church

"As God's Chosen Ones" ...That's how Paul begins our reading for this morning..."as God's chosen ones" and when I read it I instantly began thinking about what it means to "Be Chosen". The Bible of course is basically a compilation of stories about Chosen People. Abram and Sari, Vashti, all the Marys really I could go on forever...stories of amazing people chosen to do amazing things. Then you've got all those not so amazing people, David, Jonah, Judas, Saul...but they too were chosen to play a role in the telling of this incredible story...this story of God's acting in the world that we claim as our own.

But when I thought of being chosen I have to admit it wasn't the Bible I went to right away. Where my brain went flying to was that moment on the playground...you know the one I mean...the one where you're standing there at recess with all your peers...and the two Captains start choosing their teams...one

by one names are called, always the talented ones first, quickly followed by those who aren't so talented perhaps but are popular, and you just stand there hoping against hope that your name gets called, that you get chosenanyone else have that memory...that was the worst, wasn't it? I remember it so clearly: Standing there and waiting whispering under my breath "*choose me choose me*".

We learn, pretty early on, that being chosen is equal to being wanted. Like that scene in Grey's Anatomy where Meredith says to Derek "Pick me. Choose me. Love me." Being chosen means we fit, it means we belong. It means we are loved. And isn't that what we all so desperately want?

It won't be news to any of us that the world Jesus was born into was one dominated and controlled by religious and societal norms put in place to keep people in their place. And he spent his entire ministry doing everything he could to counter that. The powerful put up walls to keep people out so he wandered around knocking them down and letting people in. The powerful said "Don't talk to unclean people" so he went and searched for them and not only talked with them but touched them and ate with them and called them "friends". The powerful said "tell your friends to be silent" and he said 'even if I did the stones

themselves would shout out” (Luke 19:39-40). The powerful said “obey the rules or else” and he said “it’s a new rule I give...just love one another.” (John 13:34).

And so Paul, who knew firsthand what it was to be chosen by God and freed by Christ’s love begins our reading this morning with: “As God’s Chosen Ones...” Sitting in his prison cell he wrote to that young and struggling church in Colossae because he wanted them to know that they were not alone but he also wanted to remind them of something. He wanted to remind them that being chosen by God did not mean they now had an upper hand or the right to exclude others. Rather their job was to clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. He wanted them to forgive each other. But more than anything he wanted them to clothe themselves in love so that the Peace of Christ would rule in their hearts (Colossians 3:12-15).

It was a beautiful beginning but as with many beautiful beginnings time got in the way and as the centuries turned into millennia the church took the idea of being chosen by God and flipped it on its head. Before too long the church or rather the church leaders turned into mirror images of those Leaders Jesus had stood up to, reflections of the Leaders in Colosseum who wanted to shut people

out. The church has historically shut out a variety of people in a variety of ways: Woman from leadership, people with different sexual orientations and gender identities. Like those dreaded and oddly powerful Team Captains from my childhood, the church started picking and choosing.

It started putting up walls built of rules and expectations and it decided who was allowed in and more to the point who was not. And it worked, I mean the church gained a lot of control for a while. I have joked before that our pews would be full every Sunday if we asked for three letters of reference and declared a minimum base salary amount before you could attend here. We Humans love exclusive clubs...we love it when membership has its privileges...privileges that not everyone gets to tap into. Man we love that. Why do we love that? Perhaps it's because as Richard Rohr says "Being over and against is easier than being in love" (Everything Belongs page 22).

"Being in love" is hard. And I don't mean romantic love...which is hard don't' get me wrong...I've been married nearly 14 years and I know it's hard. Hands up who's been married more than 14 years, 30? 50? 60? More than 65?! Yah, then they know it's hard. But what I mean today by "being in love" is:

“existing in love”. Because the thing about love, at least the love Jesus was talking about...is it means making space, it means changing our minds, it means sacrificing, it means tearing down walls and opening the doors, it means welcoming the stranger and loving the enemy, it means facing our own mistakes and asking for forgiveness, it means accepting the fact that none of us is perfect and giving forgiveness, it means finally accepting our holy rules will not, cannot, control God...it means being patient and compassionate and kind and meek...things that the world out there tell us are pathetic. It means being and doing a whole lot of hard things. But no one ever said that the Good News of Jesus Christ was easy.

Being Chosen does not make life easy. Kathleen Norris wrote “...being God’s chosen does not mean doing well. It does not grant access to all the answers but means contending with the hard questions, thankless tasks, and usually a harrowing journey which in Jesus case leads to the cross” (Amazing Grace page 141). But perhaps the hardest thing about this Love we are called to be in, comes down to our understanding of what being chose ultimately means.

I remember a moment at summer camp (where there were many times I stood waiting to be chosen for various things) when my councilor, who upon discovering I was a United Church kid, became deeply concerned for my salvation. She asked, "Nora, do you choose Jesus?" I assured her that I did, and I accepted him into my heart more to get her off my back than anything else. But if I'm to be honest what I wanted more than anything was to belong, I wanted to be chosen and if choosing Jesus got me that then fine. I wish I could go back in time and tell that terrified little girl that the councilor had it all wrong. Norris goes on to remind us that in the 15th chapter of John's gospel Jesus says "you did not choose me, I chose you" (Kathleen Norris Amazing Grace pg 141-42).

We learn, pretty early on, that being chosen is equal to being wanted. It means we fit, it means we belong. It means we are loved. And isn't that what we all so desperately want? The Good News of Jesus Christ is that this is exactly what God so desperately wants us to accept. That are wanted, we do belong, we are so deeply and unconditionally loved...just as we are.

That's the good news! But that's also the hard part about the good news. Because we have to accept the fact that it's not about who we choose, it's not

about what we think God is, it's not about what we think God thinks about all those folk who seem so "different" from us.

It's about the fact that God has chosen us, all of us, like ALL OF US, to live in relationship with God and with each other. David Lose wrote on his blog [...in the meantime](#) that "...God's essential and core being has always been a giving and receiving and sharing of love that finally spills out into the whole of the universe and invites all of us into it." (www.DavidLose.net "Three in One Plus One").

And it's beautiful and amazing and life changing if you let it be, but it's not easy. "Being over and against is easier than being in love" (Richard Rohr "Everything Belongs" pg 22). But that's why this moment is so important. That's why this church of ours, what we have done for the last 93 years and what we promise to do today is so essential. As we become (or consider to become) an Affirming Ministry, we say boldly, that this world needs the voice of this church and that we aren't going to take the easy way, we will not be silenced. Today we proclaim that we are going to be to be intentional about being in, existing in, sharing in God's love, and that we believe this is a gift given by God to everyone

and by “everyone” – we mean everyone, we mean our gay friends, our lesbian friends, our bi, non-binary and our transgender friends. We mean our friends from different cultures and different socio-economic situations. We mean our friends from different churches, and different faiths. When we say that “we believe God chooses everyone” we need to really own that one word, *everyone*. Knowing that it includes all of you gathered here are today, God’s chosen ones holy and beloved...and that guess what everyone who didn’t come today....well they’re chosen too, holy and beloved. And we can do this, because of the promise God painted in the sky. The promise that we along with all of creation are called to gather beneath that sacred rainbow sharing the Good News. May God bless our journey now and forever. Amen.