

Gates Presbyterian Church
"Circle Up"
World Communion Sunday
Mark 10:13-16
The Rev. Carol Anne Strawbridge
October 5, 2003

It all began in the middle of the summer. Scott Blystone, chairperson of the Stewardship Committee, asked me to give on October 5th, and I quote, "an enthusiastic Minute for Stewardship concerning mission and youth at GPC." He continued by saying it would be accompanied by a visual presentation prepared by Frank Mancini. "Sure," I said, thinking to myself, "That will be great! I am really enthusiastic about both mission and youth, plus, I truly appreciate Frank Mancini's ability to reflect the spirit of worship in his video work."

NO PROBLEM.....

As fall planning evolved, October 5th became my Sunday to lead worship - "Great!" I said, to myself, "October 5th is World Communion Sunday - one of my favorite Sundays. I have always loved the thought of Christians around the world, sharing communion in the same 24-hour time span.

NO PROBLEM.....

Last month the Mission/Peacemaking Committee Meeting requested time to give a Minute for Mission concerning the Peacemaking Offering - When? October 5th. "Ok" I thought. "That makes sense as the Peacemaking Offering is received on World Communion Sunday."

NO PROBLEM.....

Then October 5th got a little closer and I began to put this service together: a minute for stewardship, a video presentation, a minute for the Peacemaking Offering, World Communion, sermon, and suddenly I see Ed Vander pointing to his watch, not to mention church school teacher's pacing in their classroomsand I start to get a little anxious - even kind folks like yourselves get a little grumpy after two hours of sitting on these pews.

THAT'S A PROBLEM!

As people of the reformation, the starting point for the worship is the biblical text. So I looked up the lectionary readings for October 5, 2003 and I read Mark 10: 13-16:

"People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them: and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to the disciples, "let the little children come to me; do not stop them."

Ah- ha - and it all fits togetherWorld Communion, peacemaking, youth, mission, stewardship. Today is about celebrating the radical inclusive love of God: a God who welcomes us all - adult, youth, even children. It is about celebrating the radical inclusive invitation of Christ: a Christ, who invites folks from every corner of the world to sit at table with him. And it is about celebrating the radical inclusive action of the Spirit: a Spirit who empowers us to be advocates for peace and justice in all of the world.

“let the children come to me”

We are the children and we are all invited to come to the table of our Lord.

When I recall my own childhood days, I remember sitting in those little wooden desk in school and watching the hands of the clock slowly move to the hour of recess; the vision of the playground got me through my times tables. I must say, however, that in Morehead Elementary School, we played way too much Dodge Ball during recess. In Dodge Ball, one team circles up and one team stands in the middle. The team in the circle throws the ball in order to hit the team members in the middle. If the ball hits you, you are removed from the game all together. I was always one of the first three people banished from the circle. It is not much fun to watch the action from the outside of the circle simply because you are a klutz.

I wonder how many times we banish people to the outside of the circle - exclude them in ways that are far more serious than a childhood game. Did you know that 9 million children in the US do not have health insurance and that 90 percent of those children have at least one parent that works? Did you know that every 43 seconds a child is born in this country into poverty? These children are truly on the outside of the circle. In our scripture reading today, Jesus was indignant at the exclusion of children. I think we should be indignant at the exclusion of our own children from such things as good medical care, education, and nutrient. We have money and power in this country - 12 million of our children should not be living in poverty.

Jesus was indignant in our reading today because some adults tried to prevent the children from coming to him. Didn't the disciples, remember the life stories of their own prophets. As we heard Sally read, Jeremiah was a child when God called him into service.

But the biblical story tells us there were other adults on the scene of this story. They were the ones who had brought the children to the spot in the first place. We aren't sure who they were, but it is not hard to imagine that they are mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. They were the adults who believed that Jesus would welcome their children and they were right. The story begs the question, “Where are we in this story?” encouraging or preventing encounters with Jesus? Excluding or including God's peoples

It is a joy to be in partnership with you in the mission and ministry of Gates Presbyterian

Church. It is easy to be enthusiastic about the ministry at GPC. For you are people who encourage God's children: children in Guatemala, Jamaica, Sudan children in refugee camps, homeless shelters, and soup kitchens. You know that God calls you to be part of God's welcoming team through gifts of time and money.

Three years ago our youth program won a national award for the way in which our youth serve our world. In just a few moments, Frank Mancini has compiled a visual presentation that reflects the progression of that program. Junior High youth spend a week in the summer as volunteers in urban Rochester. Senior Highs do the same, however, their mission sites are out of town, sometimes even out of state. Our twelfth graders travel out-of-country to Jamaica for the same intent. Hunger, homelessness, and poverty are not strangers to our GPC youth. They have witnessed all first-hand. You, the members of GPC, through your stewardship of money and time have been the adults of the biblical story that have brought and continue to bring children to Jesus - that award was to all of you. Yes, it is easy to be enthusiastic about the mission and ministry of GPC!

So, is this sermon in response to the scripture reading today ... or is it a Minute for Stewardship in response to Scott Bystone's request ... or is it an invitation to share communion with Christians throughout the world in response to the church calendar?

It is all of the above, for all three requests are tightly interwoven.

Amen