

## Community-Developed

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*Date:* 2017

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## **Draw the Circle Wide** A Junior Youth Led Worship Service

### Introduction/Welcome

- 1 On behalf of the Junior Youth, a very warm welcome. We are glad you have joined us in this place at this time. This day will never exist again, it is a gift, and we look forward to sharing in it together. Has anyone brought guests today, or is anyone here brave enough to just show up at a new church? Please introduce yourselves. We would like to make sure you are welcomed.
- 2 A little introduction to this morning. As you can see, in true teenager fashion we have taken some liberties and have decided our own theme for today, so if you prepared by reading the lectionary texts, that is still time well spent, but not what we will be talking about today.
- 1 The themes for today are Belief and Inclusivity. As parents you want your children to be brave, well here you have it, we are willing to dive in to the big stuff. And I know you are all very curious, but you have to wait awhile before we explain the part that the stones play in the service.  
May the words that we speak and the words that you hear honor our God and honor each other.

### Call to Worship

- 1 Come join the circle for Jesus is calling
- 2 God calls us into the circle of visions and dreams where all are welcome and included.
- 1 Look around and see who is here, look at all the faces
- 2 God has called us here to celebrate the wideness of God's community and grace
- 1 Let us worship the God of Justice for all times and places together.

Leader

Let us pray.

God we hear your voice calling out to us, reminding us to do one thing. Draw the circle wide, draw it wider still.

As we gather in this place and time open our hearts to the breadth and width of your vision for the church. Awaken in us a dream larger than we have dreamed before, a dream of a place and time where *all* are welcome and included.

We pray in the name of Jesus who taught us about the wideness of your grace and taught us to pray words like these....

Congregation

The House of God is not just for the holy, or the wise, or those who fit in.

But often we have tried to limit access to God's House in many ways.

Sometimes we have done it on purpose, sometimes purely by accident.

But still we have shut the doors, leaving others outside.

For the times we have not lived out your call to inclusivity forgive us,

Open our eyes and hearts to the needs of those who wait by the door.

Leader

The God who calls us together welcomes one and all, sinner and saint, old and young.

When we stray from God's Way we are forgiven and given a new start.

We rejoice in the wideness of God's grace and love. Amen

Hymn: STS 113 – *I will Stand in the Congregation*

Scripture Reading: Luke 7:43b-47

Scripture Reading: John 8:6-8

Scripture Reading: Luke 5:19-21

## Children's Story

- 1 Today we are going to read a great book about families. Now families are very important. Your families are very important. And I think we know most of your families and we agree that you have a wonderful family. And as a church we are part of a church family. And it is also a very good family.
- 2 Now at our church we have many families, though most of the families here look very much the same. We have some families from different countries, but we are quite a similar group. So one thing that we all need to learn, you at your age and the rest of us at our ages, is that there are lots of kinds of families. And you have a great family, but so do the people who have families that look very different from ours. We want to

thank God for our families and thank God for families that are all very different from each other. Here let's read the book. (Read the book *The Great Big Book of Families*)

Song: *Draw the Circle Wide* (by Gordon Light, Mark A. Miller, Katherine Saxon)

## Meditation

- 1 As Junior Youth we are a “Becoming” generation. We are not as young as we used to be, we don't all come to the front anymore when the children's story is being told. We also recognize that we are not as old as those cool senior youth and clearly not yet as old as many of you. But we have been watching and listening, and we have been learning. And now we are starting to establish what our beliefs are going to be. We recognize that we still have lots to learn. It appears that as we push into understanding even a part of the Great Mystery, as we try and see into the Great Cloud of Unknowing, that this learning is probably more than a lifetime pursuit. However, we also can't throw up our hands and say that because the mystery is so great we can't believe anything specific. To borrow a phrase from the current Irish theologian Peter Rollins, when he references speaking of God, and I quote: “That which we cannot speak of is the one thing about whom and to whom we must never stop speaking”
- 2 We are starting to understand that our beliefs are important. That these beliefs are the foundation on which we will build our lives. So what will we believe? As a “Becoming” generation we will soon need to take our own place in the long heritage of the church. We will need to understand what we believe, for our own sakes, for the sake of the world, and as odd as it sounds, we will need to understand what we believe because there will be another “Becoming” generation who will be watching and listening to us, and will be forming their own beliefs.
- 1 To say it one more time, we are developing our beliefs and are *beginning* to realize that our “understanding” of God will always be limited and lacking. But as we start to acknowledge that we are seeing through a glass darkly, the one thing that does seem clear is that what we must do is “believe in the right way” as opposed to “having the correct beliefs or understanding” of God. How we believe might be more important than what we believe. We would like to leave the black and white absolutes that have been part of many of our pasts, yet at the same time not swinging to a place where everything is relative and there are *no* answers. Believing in the right way puts the correct emphasis on love and sacrifice, not correct doctrine. In fact, we are starting to believe that to love is to know God because God is love.
- 2 As young aspiring Anabaptists we recognize we can't just make this stuff up. As Anabaptist wannabes, we need to look to the life of Christ as our best example. The scripture passages we read earlier were almost awkwardly short – select verses that did not tell the whole story or its context. And that was intentional. We wanted

the emphasis to be on Jesus's response to a familiar situation, not on the details of the situation itself. In each of the scripture readings the "Church" at that time wanted Jesus to commit to a specific understanding of God and what God meant. The Churchy folks were very demanding – *"Was God not clear, was Moses not clear, come on, Jesus, we need good doctrine here....don't you and these other people have the **correct** understanding of God? Because, as you know, here in our synagogue "We're just preaching the Torah."*

Even today, many like to say that the Bible is clear: "the wages of sin is death" - and in parentheses like to add "and we are here to bring those wages of death." They've missed the point. They have missed the part about believing in the right way. Jesus warns that if we choose to go our own way it will end badly. He was not there to "bring about the wages of sin" but to lovingly and passionately deliver the point. To point out that there is a far better way, that he is a far better way....and this way brings life.

- 1 Interestingly, in each of these scriptures, Jesus did not check with the protagonist regarding their view on doctrine. People at that time were certainly transgressing the day's interpretation of biblical law. Jesus, however, saw acts of love – and that was enough. He might also have said that to love is to know my Father, because my Father is Love.

For us as a "Becoming" generation, we believe that this means we also need to stop falsely defining people, and categorizing others as *us* or *them*. There are many strong and angry voices these days yelling and powering up and telling us that if we want to be safe we have to clearly define Us and Them. We need to build walls. All the yelling and powering up is scary for our generation. We do want to be safe. And we do recognize that we are also sometimes more comfortable with people who are more like "Us". But do we need to do this fear-based defining?

- 2 We can't. Even if it's scary not to. We have to stop labeling and defining. One potential "silver lining" in all this powered-up anger might be that the church could articulate its voice, a voice that would be clearly different, based on the example and love of Jesus. A welcome alternative to the angry voices clamoring in the world. But sadly the voice of the church has often been the same. Let *us* put a label on *you* and then see if you are "Us" or "Them".

- 3 Are you Christian or Muslim?
- 4 Are you gay or straight?
- 5 Are you liberal or conservative?
- 4 Are you male or female or transgender?
- 5 Are you MB or MC?
- 4 Are you gifted or not?
- 3 Are you rich or not?

- 1 There are many here who would like our church to be labeled as a liberal Christian voice, an alternative to the dominant conservative one. But we need to go beyond that. We do need our beliefs; they inform us about who we are and how we ought to live. But here in this sacred place our only issue should be how we love and embrace each other. This place needs to be a place for all of us whether we are theologically conservative or liberal, those of us who believe in God and for those of us that find that hard, for those of us who are on a journey regarding sexual orientation and for those of us who have found our spot on that continuum. There is an old song - it was musically not the greatest and the words could have been written by a 6 year old, but it simply and profoundly proclaimed "*They will know we are Christians by our Love*". Sometimes simple is best.
- 2 And now to the stones. These stones have been scattered around the sanctuary to represent our various beliefs. And the issue is not that we have beliefs, but that often our beliefs have been destructive and hurtful. They have done violence even when we did not intend it and sometimes, regrettably, when we did.
- 1 So we would invite you in groups for 6-10 to go to one of the areas. There are Junior Youth there with bubble wrap. We want you to collectively take the bubble wrap and together wrap a stone. While doing so, privately confess that while our beliefs are important, they sometimes cause violence to those around us. After it is wrapped, please have one person from each group come lay their stone at the front of the church.

*Music to play during ritual*

## **Congregational Pledge/ Prayer**

Leader We invite you to read this pledge together:  
In The Way Things *Have* Been:

All We have said:  
We are conservative  
We are liberal  
We are gay  
We are straight  
We are men  
We are women  
We have divided up our own Body into Us and Them  
We have believed lies  
We have told lies

Leader And the Way Things *Could* Be:

All God calls us to believe that  
All men, all women, are human  
Equal in the sight of eternity  
We share the same breath  
We inhabit our bodies  
We are all fed by blood  
And love  
And food  
And water  
We celebrate and mourn  
We rejoice and grieve.

Leader We Search for a *New Way* of Being

All We have been created with dignity  
We have been created in love  
We respond to the call to return to who we truly are  
Who we were meant to be  
In Community, in Diversity, in Conversation, in Love  
We are the Body of Christ  
The Body of Christ is the people of God  
Gathered here, and carried in our hearts  
This is the body we have - this is our body.

Pastoral Prayer

Song: *Draw the Circle Wide* (by Gordon Light, Mark A. Miller, Katherine Saxon)

## **Benediction**

Leader We go from this place to draw the circle wider.  
May our hearts and love know no borders, may our dreams be  
larger than before.  
We go from here to open the circle to those who call us,  
Seeking to answer their cry for justice as part of a global community.  
And we go to do this knowing that we travel the journey of life with the  
God whose love encompasses the whole world.

Junior Youth Thanks be to God!  
Amen.