

Sermon
Third Sunday After Pentecost
Sunday, June 9th, 2024
The Reverend Victoria Scott
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
Readings: [1 SAMUEL 8:4-11 \(12-15\), 16-20 \(11:14-15\); PSALM 138; 2 CORINTHIANS 4:13-5:1; MARK 3:20-35](#)

There is more room than you think. This is something I've heard Buddhist teacher and author Pema Chödrön suggest. There is more room than you think. When I've heard her express this idea of "more room", she's been talking emotions, and encouraging those who are struggling, overwhelmed, to remember that there is room for the difficult feelings. She says this in her book "When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times":

"Things don't really get solved. They come together and they fall apart. Then they come together and fall apart again. It's just like that. The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy."

This coming together and falling apart needs space to happen: there is movement from grief to relief, and between misery and joy. That space is there, in our hearts, in our minds, waiting for us to move in it.

I often find myself hearing this whispering of “there is more room than you think” between the lines in the Gospels. I hear it today as Jesus says, “Who are my mother and my brothers? [...] Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

We're only a few chapters into Mark's story about Jesus and the way that Jesus is in the world is eliciting a strong response from those around him. Last week we had Jesus causing upset by working on the Sabbath. Today, we've got those around him suggesting that Jesus is out of his mind.

Jesus's way of being in the world would certainly have been shocking at the time. There were deep lines and categories defining who was who in first century Mediterranean society. Religious observances and practices were part of it. Family was a huge part of that – there were tight circles of family and social hierarchy in that world. Jesus being accused of being out of his mind would have impacted the whole family: they would have been deemed crazy, out of their minds, by association.

I can see why those around Jesus – including his family – struggled to find room within those lines, within those circles in that world, in that society for Jesus's behaviour! What the Gospels convey to us again and again is that those around Jesus witnessed great power from him. We don't hear anywhere in the Gospels that Jesus is accused of being a charlatan, a fake. In that first century perspective, power like that could only come from God, or from Satan. These accusations of Jesus being out of his mind – demonic – are an indication that those witnessing his words and actions are struggling to reconcile his behaviour with the religious perspective and categories of the day. They are struggling to accept that this healing power, this message from Jesus that is so different from what they are used to, is from God, so it must be from Satan. There is no room in their perspective for Jesus to be God made visible, tangible in the world.

Saying people are “crazy” or “out of their minds” is strong language. It's a way of shutting down views and actions – dismissing them, leaving no space for them.

Jesus question “Who are my mother and my brothers?” is a question that makes room. This is not about dismissing or discrediting his mother or his brothers. It's about suggesting that there is more room than any of them think. To borrow from our last hymn this morning: it draws the circle wide.

The way that Jesus moved in the world – healing on the Sabbath, eating and drinking with outcasts and sinners, reaching out to the vulnerable and marginalized stretched the religious and social structures of the day – it made the circle wider to allow for more movement. Jesus was showing those around him, and he's showing us that there is more room than we think.

Our reading from 1 Samuel is also an opportunity to consider that there is more room than we think. Political leadership – then, and now – can be positive. Problems arise when leaders are motivated by love of power rather than the power of love, when they act out of self-interest, and when they claim an ultimacy that they do not possess. Samuel's warning of this “downside” to earthly kingship reminds us that our human structures and systems are limited, and they can be *limiting* in unhealthy ways if we fail to

remember that they are not the ultimate governance and guide for us in our humanity. We need certain guidelines and structures in our humanity, but we need always to make space alongside those structures and guidelines for the movement of God's grace.

Questions can offer an edge against which to judge political policies and actions against God's vision for us and for our world. Sometimes we will need to take up space – to make space for the Spirit to move – by questioning policies and actions. God invites us to do that not by loudly discrediting the other, but by asking questions that open and stretch – that create space – and invite into a place of flexibility and movement.

Paul assures the Corinthians, and we are assured, that nothing will separate us from God's love. Jesus came to reconcile us to God, to draw us into relationship with God, forever. That reconciling, that connection cannot be broken, and it holds us in all of life. That connection makes room in our hearts, in our minds, for us to experience all of life, with all its ups and downs, its grief and relief, its sorrow and joy. Our connection with God makes room for us to bend without breaking, for us to stretch, for us to grow.

6th century monk Dorotheos of Gaza is said to have traced a circle in the sand. He drew lines from around the circle to a point in the center. In one of his homilies, he invited his hearers to imagine such a circle, with God as the center point:

“The straight lines drawn from the circumference to the center are the lives of human beings,” Dorotheos said. “...To move toward God, then, human beings move from the circumference along the various radii of the circle to the center. But at the same time, the closer they are to God, the closer they become to one another; and the closer they are to one another, the closer they become to God.”

I love the idea of God as the center point – I’m looking forward to singing “God, the still point of the circle, ‘round whom all creation turns”, in our final hymn today – I love the idea of God as the still point, and I love the invitation that we have as followers of Jesus to draw this circle wide, and wider still, and to draw closer to God and in doing that to draw closer to one another, but our lives are not straight lines! Sometimes our lives are the opposite of a straight line, they become a tangled mess!

We are invited to continually reach for God, move toward God, and in doing so to draw closer to one another. Not in a straight line, though, but along a path that allows room for all that arises in us in that reaching and moving and growing. Back to Pema Chödrön: “[Things]...come together and they fall apart. Then they come together and fall apart again. It’s just like that...healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy.”

May we experience our scripture this morning, our song, our prayer, our Sacrament as a reminder that there is more room than we think. There is room for all our feelings. There is room for our discomfort. There is room for coming together and falling apart. God is with us in all of it, loving us. God’s Spirit is at work, all around us, inviting us to make room for the Spirit to move, in us, and in our world, in Jesus’ name. Amen.