

Sunday October 17, 2021  
Scriptural Lesson: Psalm 104: 1-19, 35c  
Gospel Mark 10: 35-45  
Sermon Series: Holy Spectrum Green  
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

- **We are in a new sermon series entitled “Holy Spectrum”; a series designed to explore the Rainbow that we have invested in on our lawn that has the words, “ All Are Welcome Here”; along with the social issues, topics, spiritual growth and possibilities contained in it.**
- So the color that I would like to examine closely this morning is the color **green** of our rainbow.
- And so in researching the meaning of the color green; this week I would like to begin our conversation with the potential contained in the color green of this rainbow; for green represents nature, communication, balanced emotions, harmony, love, vitality, growth and safety.
- However, there is a particular section of our society that I feel it is important to name, who may not be able to absorb the beauty and full potential of this

green; **for the harm** that has been done to this community is enormous.

- **For the judgment** that this particular community has received from the world and church included, I would imagine has made it very difficult for them to be able to marvel at the beauty of the Earth nor feel safe in it.
- **The violence that has been** afflicted upon this community; I would imagine has left many of them wondering if true love could exist for them;
- And unfortunately, because of some of the inflammatory and controversial scriptures and texts that have been thrown at this particular section of our society from scripture, I would imagine that the communication is evident to this particular section of our society; that they are not ok in God's eyes or ok period; thereby causing them to question their self-worth and value as a whole.
- And some may suggest, well Kirstie, "you already preached about women a couple of weeks ago for United Methodist Women Sunday";

- For we all know that there are many controversial scriptures that would name quite clearly that I shouldn't even be up here speaking to you right now, let alone be claiming to be a Pastor.
- However, it is because of the metaphorical stripes that I bear as a Black Woman in a cross-cultural context; where I have two things going against me as far as I am concerned; being Black and being a Woman; Why I choose not to tread lightly this morning with my words that I intuitively know come from the heart and soul of God,
- For it is through my struggles, that I can identify in many ways with our LGBTQIA community; the struggle and the heartache and the angst they must feel, living in a world that often chooses not to hear, see and understand their story.
- So if you are still engaged with me in this message, my prayer is that you might have an open heart and listening ears to hear a perspective of advocacy, that you may not have considered before, as it pertains to our queer siblings in Christ Jesus.

- As you know, the United Methodist Church has come to a pivotal point of our Church history, where what makes us United may be severely at risk.
- For the General Conference of the United Methodist Church will be postponed until 2022, due to the pandemic;
- Typically the General Conference meets every 4 years to **set the rules and establishes procedures for virtually every aspect of the church's life.**
- It also communicates the denomination's official position on a variety of issues and cultural challenges where these findings can be found in the Book of Discipline.
- One of the major social issues and challenges is on how the United Methodist Church holds space and values the membership and ministries of LGBTQIA persons.
- Currently the United Methodist Church language as it pertains to inclusivity within the Church in article IV states;

*The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status,<sup>4</sup> or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection.<sup>5</sup> In The United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition.<sup>6</sup>*

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- A statement where at first and perhaps even second glance, one might overlook that there are a few missing groups from this section.
- For I see the inclusivity statement explicitly state that there should be the inclusion of all persons in the worship services, participate in its programs, receive the

- sacraments, upon baptism and so on; without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition;
- However, without fear of inciting a raucous up in here; **I am not seeing** categories such as gender listed here;
  - **I am not seeing** disability listed here;
  - **I am not seeing** age listed here;
  - **I am not seeing** education level listed or even spelled out here.....( I am assuming it can be implied when they say “status” ...but still)
  - **I am not seeing** human sexuality listed here....
  - None of these categories are explicitly listed here.
  - And some may interject and say that some if not most of these categories and more should be implied here that the **Church really means All,**
  - But My question would be, “Do we though?”
  - For the other language that will be addressed at General Conference where it states that ; *self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church. (Para. 304.3);*

**Along with language** that states; the United Methodist Church recognizes the “sacred worth” of all persons, but also states that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" and bans financial support of LGBTQ-based groups.

- **Along with language** that currently prohibits myself and other colleagues from marrying same-sex weddings; an act where a clergy person would receive a minimum one-year suspension without pay for the first wedding, and permanent removal from ministry for the second.
- **This language in my eyes** makes it clear that the fact that these missing categories are not listed, is a problem here;
- Like the saying, *Houston we have a problem.....*  
**Lincoln, Nebraska we have a problem here!**
- **We have a problem** as I bring in our first psalm of 104 this morning;
- Where the assumed writer David is proclaiming words of adoration to God; Bless the Lord, O my soul.  
O Lord my God, you are very great.

You are clothed with honor and majesty,

- And Our problem Church the way I see it, is that our statement of Inclusion as the United Methodist Church as a whole has language that suggests that **not everyone is going to get** to experience the praises of David.
- **Not everyone is going to get** to receive the full experience of living out their vocational call in the areas of prayer, presence, gifts, service and witness within our walls;
- And some might suggest, “Well Kirstie, we never said that “they (insert missing group) couldn’t come to worship with us...”; “they can still experience joy; they can still experience meaning and fulfillment.”; “it’s essentially the same thing!”
- And my response would be, “Is it though?”
- So where I am at in all of this discernment process of how we might receive our LGBTQIA communities and other categories missing from this inclusivity statement, is that now is the time for us to really pray and discern how we really see our siblings in Christ in the world and in our communities;

- For when we say All out on our lawn, or All in this book; what are we really saying?
- This is why I would encourage each of us to begin exploring opening up dialogues with one another and within our ministries, communities and more;
- Because I believe that through this process of open, safe and honest dialogue; we will be able to affirm the green potential of our sidelined communities.
- **I want you to know that I too am discerning the issues of Gender and Human Sexuality in particular within our conference and the local Church;**
- It may seem clear to all listeners today, that I had no problem jumping onto the progressive, liberal leaning side of this issue;
  - **For me what I have been naming is simply God's love for all of humanity.**
- Either way, I would like to share a brief revelation for what helped me to get to where I am today;
- For I was trained in a Church setting that once held the theology of "love the sinner, hate the sin,"

- So to be able to stand up here and advocate for the LGBTQIA as a fierce and unapologetic ally to them; comes with some measure of risk;
- **For it comes at a cost** of lost relationships, questioned theology and integrity and risk for being named as a false prophet and other hurtful labels;
- But what has helped me to get to where I am today ...
- What has helped me to get here; has been two things that I am constantly working on.
- The **first thing** I had to do within my heart, was get myself to a space, where I intentionally formed relationships around me with one goal in mind; **to stop othering the other;**
- So through my prayer time, I asked God to expand the social circle around our marriage and our family, where we would get to form intimate connections with people that were from all backgrounds, identities and more;
- Essentially I have asked God to submerge myself in communities that reflected our Reconciling statement as a Church; to be inclusive to all people period.

- **I have found myself** in this season of just wanting and craving connection;
- I don't know if it's the Covid thing or what; but I **have found myself** in a space where I am craving hearing different people's stories;
- **I find myself** resisting the normal texts messages I would send to people typically if they reached out to me first...and now I am picking up the phone, initiating conversations to the point where people have to shut me up....is this what getting older is like?
- **I find myself** wanting to hear stories that will make this thing called life make more sense;
- **I find myself** wanting to hear stories that I anticipate will bring a value and a purpose to my own experience like never before;
- Making it evident to me that the Kingdom on Earth is very much achievable;
- I guess what I am naming is that as I live into what it means to **stop othering the other**; it has allowed me to see perhaps the way God might see;

- Living into learning to stop othering the other; has allowed me to then lead into the **second thing** I am processing as we approach General Conference;
- And that is the question of, “what does it mean to be holy?”
- For I believe that this is the root issue for many people within the Church across the lines; that if we were to let in certain sections of our society to lead and to serve and to even marry; then we are somehow compromising the Gospel and the integrity of God’s mission.
- So scripturally, I have begun this exploration of discerning God’s activity within the human activity occurring both within the Bible and in our present day situation.
- So in my eyes, this exploration has begun again with the question of ,”What does it mean to be holy?”
- So I looked up the word holy online, because you all know that I tend to do that in my sermons;
- Now although the meaning of “holy” is often defined by the culture around us, I stopped by to suggest that the ancient Biblical culture gives us a different perspective.

- Merriam-Webster defines holy as a “religious or morally good; exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness.
- However Hebrew is a unique language when it comes to word studies, because words will carry the meaning of the root word that it comes from originally.
- In this way, the Hebrew word “Qodesh” is most commonly translated “holy.”
- This word comes from the root word “Qadash,” which means “to set apart for a specific purpose” (Ancient Hebrew Lexicon, [vitalbookword.com](http://vitalbookword.com) publishing, Jeff Benner).
- So while there are times that aspects of moral righteousness or Godly devotion are connected to “holy” people, on its own, the term holiness does not refer to piety or perfection.
- You see what I am saying is that when the Bible calls something “holy,” it is not speaking of purity or righteousness, but rather that something is “set apart” from everything else to do a job.

- And I don't know about you, but this really resonates within me.
- This new definition that I have never come across sparks a new revelation that I had never considered before.
- You see the longer I live, and the longer I studied these texts; there was a question that always puzzled me;
- For if David the assumed writer of our text was an adulterer, thief and a murder.... and he was still named to be the man of God's own heart;
- Or if Jesus is having conversations at the well, with a woman who was on her 6th relationship whereas the whole town shamed her for this;
- The question I always wrestled with God, was, "why did none of these things seem to matter?!"
- Heck I served at a time of witnessing in former context, pregnant women out of wedlock not being able to sing in the choir! So if this "sin" did not matter to God, why does it seem to matter so much to the Church?
- Some might suggest its because of God's Grace;
- Others might say its because of God's forgiveness;

- A spectrum of us might say its because of God's unconditional love;
- And I would reply that I totally agree, but lets not stop there in our journey to become active witnesses and contributors of God's work;
- I am inviting us all this morning to be struck by the revelation of the Hebrew definition of what it means to be holy;
- Holy...Qaudesh...means to be "set apart"
- For if 1 Peter 1:16 for instance, tells us "Be Holy, because I am holy,'
- Let us consider what Peter might be really inviting us to do with this new understanding.
- For in Peter's story, we all know that he has been through some stuff with Jesus hasn't he?!
- So understanding now holy to mean to be set apart,
- Then my "aha" moment, is this is also how David could be a man of God's own heart;
- This is how the woman at the Well officially entered her preaching ministry;

- Even in our Gospel from this weeks lectionary of Mark 10:35-45; **this is how** Jesus could so easily name who could be on His right and left side in Glory;
- Because taking this Hebrew definition of holy into consideration, it becomes evident that what we have done is not as much of a concern in God's eyes;
- For God's grace, mercy and forgiveness is our assurance of this;
- The main concern on God's heart I am beginning to see as clear as you are before me today, is if you and I are being willing to be set apart;
- Set apart to do this work of justice,
- Set apart to do this work of much needed repair,
- Set apart to do the work that would hold systems that might harm, marginalize and ostracize members of our communities, from achieving the joy of David in our psalm today, accountable for their reckless misinformation;
- For I am convinced that for God, our Creator is most concerned with our willingness to become **set apart**; to

make a positive difference and impact in the communities that surround us.

- In my mind, Jesus is focused on if you and I are all in;
- Are we willing to be set apart in our communities;
- Are we willing to be set apart in our churches;
- Are we willing to be set apart in our jobs and areas of influence;
- So that we can plant seeds that might foster, what it means to love justice, do mercy and walk humbly with God?
- So you see, examining holy under the Hebrew definition, invites us to really begin having some productive conversations, that could even perhaps keep us more united, than we could have hoped for;
- For we are in a time in our world, where we really need all hands on deck in this missional crisis; where love as a whole has seemed to have become overturned by hate;
- So the prayer is that this conversation today will help guide our path as we continue to discern what we mean when we say All people.

- Let the Church say Amen

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