

## *Live well, live wisely, live humbly so everyone feels they belong!*

*James 3: 13-4:3, 7-8a*

*Psalm 1*

Holy pieces. Over the past three weeks we have been exploring different pieces of who we are as Robertson-Wesley. The Holy pieces which are in front of us. We began with the first piece of the puzzle which was our Holy Manners. Ways in which we are to conduct ourselves that would be acceptable to God. We promised to relate to one another with respect, in humility, with patience and open mindedness, courage and compassion. The next piece of the puzzle, the yellow one, is our Mission Statement. God has called us and given us a purpose and the purpose is to worship God, to share our joys and sorrows, to learn and grow in faith and to lead active Christian lives of service, to reach out to our neighbours. The third piece of the puzzle, our red piece, helped us to explore our Anthem. This is the spirit or the attitude that guides us on our mission and in our actions - guiding us in the spirit of friendship, in the spirit of prayer, in the spirit of caring, justice, belonging, wisdom and finally in the spirit of joy.

Now today we have a new piece of the puzzle. Today we are exploring our Statement of Welcome and Inclusion. So, I will give you, as I always do, an opportunity to guess, knowing that we are missing the 5th of the puzzle, what the puzzle makes? Any ideas? Thoughts? What does this puzzle make? We have a white piece, a yellow piece, a red piece and now a multi-coloured piece. Guesses? Yes Roy. Something to offer to God; oooh we're getting closer. Closer. Any other thoughts? Any ideas? Yes Louis. A rainbow. It is a rainbow, but it's not only that. One more guess? Don't forget the red spiritual stuff. A hot air balloon? Interesting. Can you turn that into a hot air balloon Leigh? It looks more like the fishy thing. What is a jelly? A jellyfish. Well I will let you continue to ponder, and we will discover what it is next week.

But let's talk about the rainbow. Our Statement of Welcome and Inclusion is really about a discipline or practice. Of how we live out our Mission Statement. Our Statement of Welcome and Inclusion helps us to name and define who we are. Who is taking part in living out this mission, in the spirit of God, in a way that is in tune with behaviour that is and acceptable to God. The Statement of Welcome and Inclusion was created for the time in our history when we

became affirming and we use this statement to remind us that all people are included. It doesn't matter what your abilities are, doesn't matter what your gender identity is, your sexual orientation, doesn't matter your ethnicity, your economic circumstances, we are even looking at other possibilities. We affirm that there's no password, secret handshake or special requirement to be part of this community of faith. Your presence in this sacred space is enough.

James reminds us today that we are called to live well, live wisely, and live humbly. He goes on to say that it is the way you live, not the way you talk that counts. Real wisdom, God's wisdom begins with a Holy life and is characterized by getting along with others.

Now, as you know getting along with others isn't always our expertise and it isn't always easy. Quarrels happen. And let me tell you with the snow coming in September there's been a lot of quarrelling out on those streets. Quarrels happen when we lose sight of God's call. Quarrels happen when we let envy and selfish ambition guide our actions.<sup>1</sup> Each time we widen our circle we become more diverse and when we become more diverse we can't help but be changed and we can't help but have a few quarrels along the way. But this adds colour to the fabric of who we are. Our Statement of Welcome and Inclusion is only truly lived out when we learn to love as Jesus did; to love our enemies, to love strangers as well as our friends. We need to change our focus, to change the lens through which we look and not assume that everyone who's come here today is coming from the same place, with the same experiences, and resources understandings, values, faith backgrounds. There are people in our midst who may have entered this church and faith for the very first time. There are people in our midst who have come from other religions; Buddhist, Islamic, Judaism and there are people who have come from the Baptist Church, Salvation Army. Regardless of what brought you here know that you are part of us. You are us.

Now to live wisely and humbly in this diverse colorful fabric that we are in sometimes requires that we pause. That we take a moment to breathe, that we take a moment to pray, and that we take a moment to listen. We pause before judging. We pause before assuming. We pause whenever you're about to react harshly. For in doing so when we pause it will help us to refrain from unintentionally or intentionally excluding another. Our Statement of Welcome and Inclusion reminds us to keep asking who is not here, who does not feel that they belong. We need to keep looking out, reaching out, and seeing the face of Christ in all people. And if we truly love God we cannot fail to live in peace with one another. If we truly love God, we cannot fail to share what we have with each other. If we truly love God, then we cannot fail to love one another as we would be loved. This means that we will enter some uncomfortable moments. This means that our desires and perceived needs will sometimes need to be set aside for the common good. For God has truly called us to be in relationship. In relationship with each other, with all of creation. Jesus has shown us that we need to live in a spirit of abundance and hope; in the spirit of trust not fear. Jesus says repeatedly do not be afraid. The Spirit stirs within us calling us to

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<sup>1</sup> Kathy L.Dawson, *Feasting on the Word*; Year B, Volume 4, (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 90.

draw near to God, to lean into God holding on to a spirit of hope. Being a part of God's circle of love truly is countercultural; going the opposite direction.

As people of faith we are seeking away to shift the culture of greed and isolation, of negativity and selfish ambition. And we want to shift it into a culture of compassion, grace, abundance and love these holy pieces are what are held together by God's love and a common goal. Now alone each of these pieces could become a stumbling block, but when they are held in tension, and I use that word specifically, when they are held in tension, there's got to be some give and take, we will see the world as God intended. Where we're interlocked, interconnected; where every gift you bring helps someone else, and what gifts they bring helps someone else. This is a place where harmony can exist, where all are welcome, if we continue to practice the discipline of being a welcoming and inclusive community. It's not enough to just say come on in, it's not enough to just say you belong here. We need to live out our faith in our actions with one another. So, go out in this world in faith, go out knowing that you are not alone, and that when we turn out to the world we will see more than we would ever see if we turn simply into this building. For the people are the church and the people are in the world. And for this we give God thanks. Amen.