

Sermon 24.01.28

Kate Heinzl, UMC pastor

Matthew 18: 4-5

Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Psalm 8. (Nan C Merrill)

O God, my Beloved,  
How powerful is your Name  
In all the earth!  
You, whose glory is sung in heaven  
By the angels and saints,  
Who with the innocence  
And spontaneity of a child,  
Confound those who are mighty and proud,  
You quiet the unloving and fearful.

When I look up at the heavens,  
At the work of God's creation  
At the infinite variety of your Plan;  
What is woman that you rejoice in her,  
And man that you do delight in him?

You have made us in your image,  
You fill us with your Love  
You have made us co-creators of the earth!  
Guardians of the planet!  
To care for all your creatures  
To tend the land, the sea,  
And the air we breathe;  
All that you have made,  
You have placed in our hands.

O God, my Beloved,  
How powerful is your Name in all the earth!

SERMON: [Slides](#), starting at slide 15

ANABAPTIST WORLD FELLOWSHIP SUNDAY - let's unpack that a bit, and then hear a few stories.

### What does anabaptist mean?

We spent the last 2 Sundays thinking about baptism - hearing stories of making the choice to follow Christ. Anabaptist simply means to be baptized again. Today that doesn't sound like a big deal. 500 years ago it was a bold move against state religion and the Catholic church. Choosing adult baptism and negating the need for infant baptism was a big deal!

One thing I didn't say last week that I wish I had - is that as a Mennonite community of faith - UMC - we believe that baptism is an outward sign of an inward commitment to Christ, and to this body of believers. If you think you want to make that commitment - or even talk about it together, please let me know. So consider - are you ready to say 'yes'? To join this community; to name your commitment to following the way of Jesus? Let's talk! To me or to one of the elders.

### Who are the anabaptists today?

Depends who you ask... some of the groups: Amish, Hutterites, River Brethren, Church of the Brethren, Brethren in Christ, Mennonite Brethren, Mennonites - and Mennonites come in lots of different flavors.

### How are we connected? and why does it matter?

Mennonite World Conference compiles statistics of churches that are rooted in the 16th century Anabaptist movement.

This faith family includes 2.13 million baptized believers in 86 countries.<sup>1</sup> (SLIDE)

About two-thirds are African, Asian or Latin American.

We don't often consider how we're a part - a small part - of this larger movement. And today we celebrate that.

Mennonite World Conference is one of the organizations, along with Mennonite Central Committee, that works around the world with these various groups. Mennonites here in the US and Canada have struggled to figure out how to remain connected to the center, our center - Christ - and allow for differences. I can only imagine that world wide that's a task that requires these organizations to be clear about what is most important. The Mennonite world conference tagline:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mwc-cmm.org/en/membership-map-and-statistics>

**(SLIDE) Following Jesus, living out unity, building peace.**

I want to celebrate this way of being - of following Jesus, living out unity and building peace, by sharing two stories of how the church is at work around the globe.

For Elizabeth<sup>2</sup>, (SLIDE) who lives in northwest Nigeria, violence regularly erupts when Boko Haram fighters raid their village - looting, setting fire, indiscriminately killing people.

During the third attack in three years, Elizabeth's husband was killed. She was in shock - unable to express any emotion, unable to find a way forward.

She turned to a trauma-healing workshop offered by EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria. Elizabeth had taken part in one of these three-day workshops to help her recover from trauma after the first two attacks. She hoped it would help her again.

EYN, in partnership with Mennonite Central Committee, finds that increasingly, participants are returning to the workshop because the coping skills they learned the first time are overwhelmed by repeated traumas. (SLIDE)

Elizabeth is doing better coping with her life now, she says, because her second workshop experience reminded her of what she learned the first time — after a traumatic event, life continues. “I also hope and pray, she says, that peace and safety will return to my community . . . “

She remembers: Life continues... and she grounds that belief in hope and prayer that peace will return.

**(SLIDE) Following Jesus, living out unity, building peace.**

Elizabeth, and others in these workshops live out these words in ways that I, in my comfortable, stable life, can't quite imagine.

Life continues. Faith calls us forward to do the work of peace.

Another story:

When the invasion came in February 2022, Margaryita<sup>3</sup> (SLIDE) and her family were packed and ready to go. Their Mennonite Brethren church in eastern Ukraine had prepared 21 of them and helped them move to a safer location in western Ukraine. They lived all together for 8 months, an outdoor toilet, no heat in much of the house.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://mcc.org/media/document/132652>

<sup>3</sup> <https://mcc.org/media/document/132652>

Eventually Margaryita, her mother and sister (their father remained separated by the war) found a place of their own, beginning to heal from the stresses of constant upheaval and war. It was during that time that she began to hear the stories of others, seeing her pain in the framework of a larger story, and felt called to use her education to minister to others. With degrees in physical rehab and ergotherapy, and a lifelong love of horses, she knew that riding therapy, connected with massage, could bring significant changes not only for the physical body, but the spiritual as well.

Using money she made from giving massages, she worked with children identified by shelter supervisors.

Margaryita writes about this opportunity to serve, saying: Many children in Zakarpattia hide in their hearts deep suffering, including pain, fear, loneliness and rejection. (SLIDE)

When a child is in the saddle, it helps them let go of their own experience for a bit.

And that time away from the daily grind of war allows the children to talk - they might talk about what they have left behind, their fathers, their pets - the many things they loved. They might talk about what they've seen. They might simply enjoy the silence and time with that glorious creature they're on.

Those moments together, Margaryita notes - using the body in this way, each session aims to restore the child's emotional, physical and psychological health and to form them as a young peacemaker.

What a bold act of faith to believe that caring for the bodies, minds and hearts of these kids is the formation of peacemakers.

### **Following Jesus, living out unity, building peace.**

Building peace through caring for the emotional and physical needs of children. That's a radical act of love. A way of following Jesus that changes the world.

Our scripture today: (SLIDE)

Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Cesar Garcia, general secretary of World Mennonite Conference reminds us<sup>4</sup>:

To feel welcomed and accepted is a fundamental human need. To be received with a smile, a good conversation, a warm supper, a safe place to sleep – what a gift!

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[https://mwc-cmm.org/en/civCRM/mailling/view?reset=1&id=2529&cid=30828&cs=4f72020ab874d1de6d80a9dea1cb6b40\\_1705883492\\_360](https://mwc-cmm.org/en/civCRM/mailling/view?reset=1&id=2529&cid=30828&cs=4f72020ab874d1de6d80a9dea1cb6b40_1705883492_360)

On the other hand, to be rejected, evicted from a place, or simply to sense that one is not wanted here - that is not the way of love.

Right from the beginning of his life, Jesus experienced the fact of not being welcomed.

While he opened up space for the sinner and received those who were rejected, his presence made many uncomfortable.

As we celebrate Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday, let us remember that Jesus took concrete steps to accept and make space for those who suffer rejection.

And that today - even now - Christ identifies with those who are not welcome in all places.

My friends - Let us open wide, for without knowing it, we are receiving Jesus in our midst.