

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • OCTOBER 18, 2020
“WIDE-OPEN SPACES”

Song of Focus
“Go Outside”
Words and Music by Ed Varnum

“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?
“Someone who’s glorious, huge, overwhelming?
“Surely, it’s someone who is strong, in command,
“Overpoweringly excellent and wondrously grand!”

But Jesus called to him the youngest and smallest.
“You have it wrong about what truly great is.
“Watch now this little one and heed this lesson.
“One like this child is the greatest in heaven.”

Our thinking is narrow, understanding hemmed in.
We know all the answers: how it always has been.
We’re trapped in a box from beginning to end!
Jesus calls, “Go outside where new life can begin.”

Break out of the box! Go with humility,
because we cannot grow when our minds are not free.
True greatness can’t be where our minds always hide
from ideas, new life. So, break free! Go outside!

Go outside! Go outside!

The Scripture
Matthew 13:31-32

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

The Message
Wide-Open Spaces: Go Outside
Terry Overfelt



Our Uncle Dave has a huge spirit. I am humbled and eager like the child in today's Scripture to be at his side. He often thinks way away from my boxes of comforts and conviction, but since **I love him and have relationship with him**, I deeply respect his perspective and try to see, even delight in our differences. This moment in Matthew makes me want to look for Huge Spirit promptings and moments in our days and to watch for ways these open up my thinking, humility, and God's welcome and movement.

Uncle Dave makes community with Black Bears, Whistle Pigs, Stellar Jays, Moose, Turkeys, and Chipmunks. We met them on his patio. All of them come to his six-mile mountain home for food and water. He is getting up in years, and so he has decided to start to separate himself from his paradise home. He wants to be sure that whoever becomes its new owner will honor the spirit and the beauty of the place. He never locks it. He says that if someone is up on the mountain and they need in, they should get in. If they are up on the mountain, and they mean harm, they will break a window and get in, so he leaves it unlocked and empty of anything he couldn't stand to lose. He thinks outside of the security box. He turns it on its ear and steps out into the open space of generosity and philanthropy, and this philosophy has served him well.

When we go down into the town, many friends call him by name and welcome us. He is a pilot who had to surrender the air strip where he has a transmission shop, small living quarter, and a hanger for his plane. He lives there; when he needs to be in town, but this summer it shut down so that the Fire Fighters could use it to refuel in between runs to put out the flames raging through the canyon. He has been involved in many rescues over the years. He can find you. He loves to tell the stories, but he is never the hero. Circumstances, clues, and hunches have led to what he makes seem an obvious and timely find that often point to another as instrumental. **He doesn't give up the search for the lost.**

Uncle Dave seems fearless. He tells of an unidentified flying object that hovered over his vehicle on a canyon road one night and stole the wits from his then wife, who was never the same again and has absolutely no memory of the event. He thinks they took part of her brain, because he remembers it quite clearly.

This spring, Uncle Dave decided that since he will not stay on the mountain for many more years, and he would stop taking care of Sunflower. She is a black bear, who has brought her cubs up to meet him each spring for the last five or so years. They love marshmallows and dog food. I saw one of her cubs take a swipe at Uncle Dave. Their nails were as long as my fingers. He was quick to retract, but he has some scars that he has healed himself, because he can't tell anyone that he got injured by a bear, because they would be ruled dangerous, hunted, and destroyed. He is respectfully cautious and an **emphatic** advocate for nature. When he approaches wildlife, he glows with humility and respect.

So while he had decided this was the year to stop supplementing the bear diets of acorns and berries, a new mother bear showed up in the spring. She and her cubs looked malnourished. She chased them up Uncle Dave's tree, way up the pine and then ran down swatting at them; leaving them orphaned. Out came the dog food and marshmallows. So, when Sunflower came in, her cubs got fed, too. Maybe next year, Uncle Dave won't feed the bears. It's illegal. But sometimes there are rules and exceptional circumstances that cause him to **step out of the box** of laws and over to the side of compassion.

I feel like a child watching Uncle Dave and listening to his stories. It had been many years since we had been up to see him. When my sabbatical plans got cancelled for COVID restrictions, we called to see if we could come to six-mile mountain. My cousin Darla, the retired nurse answered the phone. She had come for the summer to make sure that Dave took the threat of the virus seriously. Guess that meant we couldn't come and risk exposing him from whatever we might have picked up along the way in Kansas. But Uncle Dave got on the phone and said, "**You guys get out here.**"

The week before we were to go, destructive fires broke out with the breaking news highlighting his town. I called to see if they were all right and to say how disappointed we were. Uncle Dave said, "**I can get you in here**, go up to Wyoming and drop down through Rifle." I kid you not, the next night's report was that Rifle was on fire. I was thinking this was spiritual warfare and sabbatical sabotage. Called Uncle Dave after I stopped crying, and he said he'd been thinking of a more scenic, **different route** through Independence Pass anyway and he mapped directions through the top of the Rockies. The very top, with a very narrow one lane cliff passage where we met an oncoming petrified young driver, who would not pass us without a great deal of coaxing. We were pinned in Jeff's pretty pick-up a thumb's width from scraping the mountain face. It was a gorgeous drive made more beautiful by the fact that we lived, **and** the truck was unscathed.

I felt like the child in the Scriptures today. I was the one who came when Jesus said, "**You get over here!**" Ok, Jeff was driving, but we were in agreement, if Dave said, "**Come on,**" we were going. We humbly trusted in his invitation rather than be deterred

by the warnings of the fires or our own fear. Have you ever trusted someone like that? Even against better adult judgment? It feels awesome.

In today's Scripture, Jesus and his disciples just came down from the mountain in Matthew's chapter 17. There the disciples saw him transfigured before them and in the presence of Elijah and Moses! It was a glimpse of the kingdom with the great patriarchs of their faith, long gone but fully present with Jesus. Jesus was dazzling in their company. So, in chapter 18, that got them thinking about what heaven was like and what their positions would be once they got there. Mark's rendition says they were hopeful that theirs would be seats at the right and left hand of Jesus, or do those older guys get those? But Jesus stops and **calls a child over** to him. Children had little regard but when Jesus called this child over and set them in front of the disciples, He says, "Like this one, you must change and become like children. You must **come humbly** like this child and furthermore, whoever welcomes the child, is welcoming me.

The disciples had some growing down to do. They had to flip cultural norms on their head and drop the ego to be brought low, unpretentious and humbled like a child. Humility as a noun is moral littleness, lowliness of mind or modesty. Humble as a verb is to make low. Ambitious apostles, full of competitive ego and covetous for position and control, were going to find the cabin locked.

Jesus wasn't asking anything of them that he wasn't willing to be himself.

Philippians 2.3-13: ³*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.* ⁴*Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.* ⁵*Let the same mind be in you that was^{*} in Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,* ⁷ *but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,* ⁸ *he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.*

We live in a time of great opportunity to answer the call of Jesus to come in humility. It requires us to step out of the safety of the boxes we have inhabited, unlock the doors, and move to the wide-open space where Jesus is calling us to listening, loving, relationships that hear all hearts and hopes without the need to be right.

If this were our box here, **X**, then there is an arrow pointing us to the place over there- **X**, where we should be to enter the kingdom of heaven. Go outside, away from the constructs of position, power, and judgment **that box** us in and come into the wide-open spaces with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; vulnerable and humble.

One **go-outside moment** is this week for the families and staff concerning our public schools. We might choose to stay in the safety of our homes, and we must trust with

prayer and measured consequence that we will be inspired to make the right decision for each child. Some know the online school is working for their kids, and that they may have compromised health issues that put them at risk. Others feel that it is riskier to the wellbeing of the child to keep them away from the learning and social environments that they need in order to thrive and succeed. Even others are in the difficult position of needing the supports of others to best manage the needs of their students. There are no right or wrong choices. There are bold options. There has been good listening and deciphering in this time of no absolute answers. We pray for students and staff and families to be safe, as they make decisions to move or to stay with humility and without judgment.

This week had another **go outside** moment where professional sports teams are empowering allyship where one speaks in support of LGBTQ NFL team members.

“To all team players who are thinking of coming out, when you are ready, so are we. We’ll support you, we got you, and we’re teammates. It takes all of us, and you deserve to be all of you.”

Discrimination in professional sports will not be tolerated as teams empower leadership and training to affirm gender identity. When Jackie Robinson was the first African American to play in Major League Baseball, he gloriously broke the baseball color line in 1947, ending racial segregation. Now another bold step is being made as we break out of–the- box and move into the open spaces of justice and again fight discrimination in professional sports.

What about **our insider’s** division of how to respond to the pandemic? How do Christians enter into out-of-the-box dialogue that honors the opinions of those in camps of perceived extremism with ulterior agendas? What began as a common foe the world could stand against as we invested resources and prayers into the miracle of science, quickly became a divisive, finger-pointing, power event. How do we **go outside** of the box of our opinions to genuinely hear those of the other side as we pray together for those lost, sick, and a coming vaccine?

Go outside and count the signs: Black Lives Matter. How about the names of those who have died because of racism and brutality being spoken and honored, so as not to be forgotten and more importantly to make their lives and their deaths matter for the honoring of all as children of God and citizens of the kingdom on Earth. **Go outside** of your box and onto the spot that will hear the stories, see the evidence, and be a voice for justice and criminalization of racist brutality in every form. We can’t unsee it from or toward law enforcement and bigots, regardless of how you feel this movement began. Jesus calls each of us to come like children, who are created equally, treated respectfully, and seen as beloved. *In humility, regard others as better than yourselves.*

No country worldwide has managed to eliminate discrimination against women or full equality. Recently there is alarming pushback in many countries against gender equality. We must be out of the box movers who listen and stay watchful for injustice. Attach to this outside movement the determination to human trafficking for both women and men. Objection, objectifying!

We pray for the genocidal actions committed against Indigenous peoples, and get out of our Columbus Day Box to listen to the truth of missing persons, disparity, chronic disease, poverty, and education gaps at disproportionate rates among native communities.

The adversative issues of humanity are ablaze. The cries for the environment are intense. Can we hear the voice of Jesus calling the Children of God to build the kingdom? When we feel tension in our bodies, it is a signal to move outside and to be part of a listening, relational empathy that takes action in humility for the sake of the world.

Uncle Dave would laugh at the idea that his **out-of-the-box** decisions, encouragement, and actions made me think of the call of Jesus to the child and their eagerness to come. But they do. With his voice, we moved in confidence. We don't share the same opinion on many of these hot buttons, but we have a loving desire to be in relationship, to see one another, and to have mountaintop assents and descents that make us humble servants to those in need. Even if they're bears.

May it be so. Amen.