

NO LONGER APART

Order of Service (bulletin)

<https://www.spiritofhope.ca/news-and-events>

Video (recorded live stream)

<https://www.youtube.com/@spiritofhopeunitedchurch791>

June 22, 2025

Pentecost 2

Galatians 3:23-29

Before faith came, we were under the constraint of the Law, locked in until the faith that was coming would be revealed. In other words, the Law was our monitor until Christ came to bring about our justification through faith. But now that faith is here, we are no longer in the monitor's charge. Each one of you is a child of God because of your faith in Christ Jesus. All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female. We are one in Christ Jesus. Furthermore, if you belong to Christ, you are the offspring of Abraham, which means you inherit all that was promised.

Luke 8:26-39

They came to the region of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. Jesus was stepping from the boat when he was met by a person from the town who was possessed by demons. The demoniac had not worn clothes for a long time, and was homeless, loving among the tombs instead. Seeing Jesus, the individual cried out and fell at his feet, shouting loudly, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Only Begotten of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" – for Jesus was ordering the unclean spirit to come out of the person. This spirit had seized the demoniac many times in the past, who then needed to be restrained with chains and shackles and kept under guard – yet every time, the possessed person would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into deserted places. "What is your name?" Jesus asked. "Legion," it replied, because many demons had entered the person. And they pleaded with Jesus not to order them to depart into the abyss. A large herd of pigs was feeding nearby on the hillside. The demons pleaded with Jesus to allow them to enter the swine, and he gave them permission. The demons left the person and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the hillside into the lake and drowned. When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran away to tell the story in town and throughout the countryside. The local residents came out to see what happened. And as they approached Jesus, they also saw the exorcised person sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and of a right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had witnessed it told the others how the possessed one had been made whole. Panic overcame the whole population of the region of Gerasenes, and they asked Jesus to leave them. When Jesus had gotten into the boat to leave, the person who had been healed asked to go with him. But Jesus said, "No, go back home and tell everyone what God has done for you." So the one who had been made whole went off and proclaimed throughout the region what Jesus had accomplished.

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(prayer)

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The United Church of Canada is now 100 years and 10 days old.

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I get to be a Commissioner to the United Church General Council meeting starting in this centennial anniversary year

- The 45th General Council will be the highest decision making body in the UCCan for the next three years

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In their first year, GCs have a full in-person meeting

- in Calgary, this year

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Then, GCs have annual on-line meetings until the next GC takes over

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The 45th General Council will begin this afternoon from 2pm to 5pm

- No, I don't have to rush down highway 2 right after church
- The GC45 meeting *this year* will be held in three parts
 - the first two of which will be on zoom
 - Next Saturday will be a full day of learning and discussion
 - we will hear some reports and have information sessions on some of the more complicated or important items of business that will be addressed in Calgary
 - I, and the other commissioners, have **a lot** of reading to do before next week
 - Today, we will have the official start of the GC45 2025 meeting;
 - we will pass some procedural motions;
 - be introduced to some of the main leaders and guests for this year's GC;
 - When we get to Calgary, we will be seated at tables of eight (already assigned) and occasionally we will break into small discussion groups consisting of three tables
 - this afternoon, we will be separated into zoom breakout rooms spend a little time getting to know the people who will be in our "discussion group"
 - I am in discussion group *Vulcan*
 - 🖐️ I hope to live long and prosper

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I expect that this afternoon's breakout room will follow the standard get to know you routine

- introduce yourself, where you're from, and which region you represent
- and... there will probably some personal probing questions to give people a little deeper window into hinting at who you are beyond your name and location
 - what is your favorite movie?
 - do you have any pets?
 - what do you like to do on a rainy day?

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I never know what to say

- should I try to be funny?
- should I keep it basic, so we can get my part over with and keep moving around the virtual circle?
- or... do I answer in a truly revealing, vulnerable way?
 - It's probably not really the venue to get super serious
 - kind of like when someone asks you in passing *hey, how are you?*...
 - and you have to decide how fully honest you should be
 - oh, I'm good 😊

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Small group icebreaker activities are intended to appreciate that the various faces in the room

- are not all the same
- we are each unique creatures of God... individual vessels of Spirit
- ***which, of course, we are!***

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Icebreaker games can also highlight the overlaps among us

- It can be an interest oriented overlap
 - hey, I like Star Wars too; did you watch Andor?
- It could be church related
 - hey, I'm from a rural church too
 - I'm so glad you're here; I was worried that I would be the only diaconal minister in the group
- It could be a cultural tie, or a common language spoken, or the same gender identity, or any number of characteristics of a person

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By highlighting some of what makes us unique

- we might find someone with whom we share an unspoken common bond
- And... that can bring a measure of comfort and safety

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It is a great thing realize that you are not alone

- That someone else can understand and empathize with your innate joys and sorrows

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A cautionary side of this can be that it can be too easy (at times) for assumptions of commonality to be made

- that prejudice who someone might be; how they might think;

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- one might be so presumptuous to assume how the other person *must* feel

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This certainly can be the case with outside onlookers

- Oh, I see that you are from Alberta, you must think...

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But it can also be true within the group:

- since you share this particular bond with me,
- then you must also agree with me on...

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In the Broadway play Avenue Q which is set in a world where humans and various kinds of Muppets co-exist

- Princeton is a recent university grad who moves into a new apartment on Avenue Q
- One day, while talking to one of his neighbours he says:
 - *Kate Monster, you're a monster. Well my neighbour Trekkie Monster is a monster. Are you two related?*
 - *No, not all monsters are related.*
 - Then, they sing a song about racism

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Extrapolating from one common bond to include a whole myriad of other assumed characteristics is the path to

- racism;
- sexism;
- supremacy and xenophobia
 - and pretty much every of -ism and -phobia you can imagine

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It drives me nuts when I see commentators on news shows

- extrapolating a group of people protesting the impact of the war in Gaza on its citizens
- to assume that they are pro-Hamas
 - Yesterday, I even heard CNN's resident conservative panelist say that
 - *these pro-Hamas protests have now morphed into pro-Iranian regime groups*
 - If you're going to typecast people, you've got to keep it current

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The Apostle Paul lived and taught in a world that had its stereotypical assumptions

- many of which can with certain assumed privileges and restrictions

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Within Paul's culture

- a rich, male, land-owning Hebrew person would have a systemic leg up on
 - a poor, female, servant-class foreigner

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There would be assumptions about privileges, opportunities, and priorities

- if circumstances necessitated that a line would need to be drawn,

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- the decision-criteria would be well known and unquestioned

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Paul seeks to ensure that such assumptions do not dominate this emerging movement centred on Way of Jesus, the Christ

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Paul was particularly passionate to erase the line between those who came into the church from the hebrew traditions and those who were from any number of other cultural and religious traditions

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It was radically counter-cultural for Paul to insist that...

- *In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female. We are one in Christ Jesus.*
- *Furthermore, if you belong to Christ, you are the offspring of Abraham, which means you inherit all that was promised.*

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Sadly, in many ways...

- it is still counter-cultural to promote this non-discriminatory world view.

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I think that it is easier for us to just categorize people than to learn to embrace

- what we hold in common,

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It can be easier to set people apart because of what makes us different

- than to learn the value and gift that variety truly is

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Most days, the Gerasene people could ignore the odd one who lived out by the cemetery

- this person made others uncomfortable
- they did not dress well
- they could not hold a job
- they were prone to unprovoked outbursts
- they were assumed to be a vessel for demons
- they must be avoided and shunned

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When Jesus and his companions came ashore near the tombs and encountered this person

- Jesus saw through those assumptions and saw beyond the condition that set them apart

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In the mystery of Jesus' abilities, the person was made whole

- born out of Jesus' compassion, they released from their isolation

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In an interesting side plot, Jesus also exhibits compassion for Legion, the demon

- allowing it to enter a herd of swine rather than be banished into the abyss of nothingness
 - Jesus was far less compassionate towards the pigs or their swineherders,

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- but that will have to be a sermon for a different day

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The Gerasenes were so set in their assumptions that the one by the tombs was beyond their welcome (and maybe the odd drowning of the swine)

- that when we appeared in town, it was a source of fear not welcome
- they wanted Jesus to leave

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Releasing prejudice can be transformative, but it requires effort!

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The healed one (perhaps sensing that re-integration into the community was not going to be easy) really wanted to leave with Jesus

- but Jesus said that it would be important for this person to stay...
- so that the lesson of transformation could become known in this community
 - *So the one who had been made whole went off and proclaimed throughout the region what Jesus had accomplished.*

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We live a world

- where invasion and war are the chosen means to bring about change
- where insistence on living up to treaty rights and obligations is written off as coming *hat in hand* to government officials
- where we pay millions for off brand low dosage Tylenol but make people pay for covid vaccines
- where we still categorize and make assumptions about certain people because of a single aspect of who they are

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We live in a world where we are needed to seek the transformation Jesus wanted and Paul promoted.

- a transformation that restores the isolated and forgotten
- a transformation that sees equality in spite of obvious differences

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To make this early teaching of the Christian movement come alive today

- each of us is invited to see the first thing that we notice about someone as only one part of a much bigger whole
- we are to make the effort to get below the first layer of encounter

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Paul's Galatians letter uses the words that there is no

- no Jew or Greek,
- slave or citizen,
- male or female...
- for all are one in Christ Jesus

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I don't hear Paul claiming that our differences and uniqueness are gone

- but that (in the circles founded on Christ's compassion) these differences are not to be a reason
 - to divide
 - to judge
 - to exploit
 - to reject or to set apart

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In the community of Christ Jesus

- the differences are not barriers to the fullness of inclusion and worth

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Jesus saw beyond the divisive conclusion in the land of the Gerasenes

- and their fear of an illness that they did not understand
- and simply saw the possibility of restoration and transformation

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Here is a bit of homework for us all:

- As this day unfolds wherever your travels take you
 - there will even the most passive interaction with a complete stranger
- Try to be conscious of the first thing you notice about them
 - do they appear to hold anything in common with you?
 - is there an obvious difference
- Be aware of your instinctual reaction of
 - whether you feel comfortable or nervous in their company
- Regardless...
 - tell yourself that they are a unique creation of God
 - And... that you share a uniform and complete compassion and value in the mind of that creator
- see this one as kin, family

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In spite of any differences

- We are one!

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Let us pray:

Holy God, in you, all of our variety and differences are bound together in a single love.
Amen.

#374VU Come and Find the Quiet Centre

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg