

### ***“Byzantine Rules”***

This has been a summer of Byzantium paperwork and rules - paperwork that is a maze, complicated, and sometimes punitive. Punishment. Purposefully difficult and numerous. Rules that are contradictory, or hard to understand – like a Terms of Use Legalese document.

When I'm entering my prescriptions for refunds, and they inform me the date, location, bin number, or quantity don't match their records... This is punishment. They already know all this information and yet are having this dyslexic woman enter it all over again! Why not just, you know... pay the prescription.

Because this makes it more difficult to get a payment from insurance. It requires time, patience, understanding this needs done, and many people will throw up their hands and say "I don't have time for this!" "The headache isn't worth the few bucks!"

But those few bucks, multiplied by several hundred thousand people giving up, is a hefty profit for insurance.

I felt this way with immigration paperwork. Even though the end of each page said "Part of the paperwork reduction act" I still got exhausted filling in the same information over and over again. That little phrase at the bottom felt like salt in a wound. And it made me wonder what these forms were before they were reduced - wryly, I think maybe they were reduced in font size. Immigration took 2 milkcrates full of paperwork.

+++

The church is not immune to paperwork. I know - I'm behind on much from vacation, General Council, and then this emergency surgery I had. (And am recovering well from!)

Although I didn't get to attend General Council in person, I did attend online. The paperwork was a lot of reading, but it was necessary reading. These were proposals from individuals, and conferences, about things the church should change, address, or consider such as...

- Assessment amount needing to increase if we want to keep regional and national staff. How shall we do this? Ought we do this?
- Should we do SOMETHING regarding Palestine?
- Should we ban all private conversations?
- Should we reject Christian Nationalism?

Over 5 days these several dozen suggestions were supposed to be talked about. Then a group would pull all the conversation notes and suggest a way forward such as "Do not do this" "Consider this" "Do this now" or "Study this." Then we were to vote on the suggested way forward.

But not everyone liked the way forward proposals. They wanted to vote on the actual proposals as they were.

Others wanted to debate particular words or phrases in the motions.

For the people in person, they were sleep deprived, their meals were getting delayed and cut shorter and shorter, they weren't getting bathroom breaks, and the physical ailments were making their emotions raw.

Raw emotions led to poor choices. Poor choices brought forth racist ideas, agism, name calling, insults, cold shoulders, and tears.

And the Byzantium rules, the process of how to make these choices, was not clear to the voters. Which led to lots more delayed time.

In the end, from motions on motions, and votes on whether or not to vote, I could not help but see that this General Council suffered from inaccessible laws that keep some in, and some out - intentionally or not.

The young, the Indigenous, the non-English speakers were all at great disadvantages for not intuitively understanding how to navigate the maze of procedures, paperwork, and bureaucracy. They spoke up about this. But systems don't change quickly.

Systems are big, heavy, freighters at sea. Even if the engines are reversed and on full throttle, it's still going to take a lot of effort and time to change course.

And people have to be willing to work to change the way things are.

At this General Council, some were willing and some were not. And all had raw emotions.

At the end, the First Nations asked we DO SOMETHING. Vote on their proposal. Not just make motions on motions. But time ran out. And the rules told us to part without addressing any of the Indigenous concerns - although they had explained that the Indigenous Church cannot operate without a change.

We were told to part without addressing Palestine - although while we met the full genocide of Gaza was announced by the state of Israel.

We'd voted on just a few items, out of the dozens.

There had almost been time to vote on the Indigenous concerns but someone had wanted to wordsmith. And the clock ran out.

I know it wasn't intentional.

It felt like it.

An Indigenous woman shouted as court went to adjourn, "Isn't there SOMETHING we can do?" How could we just leave before the vote and delay the decision on funding of the Indigenous church?

No. She was told.

But then a Settler stood up who knew the bureaucracy, and forced a vote on a vote, a motion on a motion, and we went late and voted finally on the Indigenous motion to fund the space to create their leadership structure. There was a way forward, there was something that could be done, but it took knowing how to manage the system like the skilled captain of a giant sea freighter.

The ship couldn't reverse course in the time available, but it could be finessed into a turn.

And so funding was approved to assist the indigenous church form itself and have leadership.

But the same motion and vote gymnastics couldn't happen for Palestine because we hadn't yet started on those proposals at all. However, we had voted to give the power to national to use a principles based approach to address issues.

And we were promised to return next month to continue the work online.

Because the Holy Spirit is active - our scripture given to us today is on rules, rest, and DOING something. God is speaking directly to the reality of us.

The reality of when our systems intentionally, or accidentally, harm and exclude minorities.

The reality paperwork and procedures tend to favour the majority and punish the odd.

You've encountered this any time you had to put in your address and the computer insists that address doesn't exist. You're not in a city.

Or when you've rang up a company and can only get voice prompts that never understand what you say. Your accent is not the accent the computer was trained on.

Or a hundred other ways micro-aggressive, systemic issues hit us. And they hit minorities - sexual, physical, racial, age, language, immigration status, religious - minorities more often.

+++

### **Jesus runs into this issue today.**

Long, long, long ago, God made a rule - keep a Sabbath. Keep a day of rest. Keep a day of no work. This no work day is essential to being a follower of God; and it keeps a country well and healthy.

Long, long ago, "work" was defined in a series of writings and teachings and clarifications such as "Can I draw water on a Sabbath?" and they decided no, that is work. Draw water the day before or the day after. "What if someone is dying of thirst?" "Well it is a worse sin to let someone die, so work to save them." And so forth.

Long ago, Jesus noticed someone who was suffering. It was the day of rest, it was time to not work. But she was suffering now. As she was not actively dying, process said she should wait.

But she had been waiting 18 years already.

**You might say** - so what is one more day? That's what the people around Jesus say.

Much like the Indigenous Church, they could have come back next month. Why work when work time was over?

I don't have a solid answer. I understand both the need to ACT NOW and the need to set boundaries. I understand how one more day or one more month isn't going to change much. But one day and one month means a lot to someone suffering.

I also know, for both this woman and for the Indigenous Church, "one more day" has stretched on for years and years. And so, Jesus saw the woman labouring for 18 years without rest and he chose to make a difference for her, now. He healed her.

One day. One month. It isn't much in the big picture - but it's everything to those suffering.

And yet - We do need rest. We do need Sabbaths. Our culture tells us to be productive all the time. This industrialization, capitalist culture tells us that our value is in what we do, and produce.

### **Time is money.**

#### **Seize the day.**

John Wesley's "Rule of Life" doesn't seem to permit rest either: "Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as you ever can."

Sabbath is supposed to be about rest. But how can we rest when Jesus seems to work on the Sabbath, and our faith ancestors teach to do good at all times, and our modern culture demands results?

**I propose it is a rules issue.** Jesus saw the system wasn't helping this woman. So, he reasoned to the others that, if we let animals rest on the Sabbath, why are we denying this woman a rest when she'd been at it not 6 days but 18 years? Jesus isn't saying toss out the Sabbath. But rather, make our paperwork, rules, and regulations work for us, not us work for them. If the rules are harming someone in the community, we need to pay attention. Listen. Value the relationship over the productivity. Maybe our system is purposefully or accidentally harming minorities.

And we can't change overnight. We can't suddenly wake up and be wholly inclusive, anti-racist, all Christ-like, and have a fully fair and just and equitable society. It is a life-long labour. But it can be done.

Two years ago one of you helped me break the sod at my place to start a garden. Each year I weed it. Each year there are still weeds. But the weeding is getting easier. Each summer, fewer weed seeds

are left in the soil. As long as I keep it up, the weed seeds are fewer and fewer. I change the inertia. The change builds up.

**And the same happens with us** - as we pay attention to the people for whom The Way Things Are is not working, and change bit by bit to be a more Christ-like community - we bring Earth to be like Heaven, just as we pray weekly. I personally don't believe in a rapture, or a sudden moment every evil is gone and every good is here with the wave of a hand or sound of trumpet. No - I believe in Christ arriving like a thief in the night - unaware, unexpected, unnoticed. I believe in Christ arriving among us as we break bread and we realize he's been with us for some time. I believe we draw nearer to Christ and Christ draws nearer to us, and we change. Our systems change. The inertia of the world changes. And Sabbath, rest, wholeness, shalom, fulfillment, peace, is known by all creation - all. **Amen.**

**Scripture Readings – August 24, 2025 – LCUCPC - from New Revised Standard Version-UE**  
**Isaiah 58: 9b – 14**

<sup>9b</sup> If you remove the yoke from among you,  
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,  
<sup>10</sup> if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,  
then your light shall rise in the darkness  
and your gloom be like the noonday. <sup>11</sup> The LORD will guide you continually  
and satisfy your needs in parched places  
and make your bones strong, and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water whose waters never fail.  
<sup>12</sup> Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;  
you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.  
<sup>13</sup> If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath,  
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;  
if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable;  
if you honor it, not going your own ways,  
serving your own interests or pursuing your own affairs;  
<sup>14</sup> then you shall take delight in the LORD,  
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;  
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.



**Luke 13: 10-17**

<sup>10</sup> Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. <sup>11</sup> And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. <sup>12</sup> When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." <sup>13</sup> When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. <sup>14</sup> But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured and not on the Sabbath day." <sup>15</sup> But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it to water? <sup>16</sup> And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" <sup>17</sup> When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame, and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things being done by him.

May God's spirit shape our understanding of these words.

**And may they awaken in our hearts.**