

June 7, 2020 – Holy Trinity – First Sunday After Pentecost

A Blessed Sunday morning to you, and welcome to our fourteenth online worship service, during the time of church closure due to COVID. Today is Holy Trinity Sunday, and the designated Gospel reading from the lectionary is Matthew 28:16-20. But, in light of the context we find ourselves in this weekend, (and last weekend), I have opted to use the scripture from Matthew 15 and Mark 7, commonly called "The Syro-Phoenecian Woman" to help us see what the Gospel and Jesus may have to say about blindness, the privilege of the dominant class within a community, and what an appropriate response might be. Brad has prepared a special composition of "Goodness is Stronger Than Evil", with photos supplied by Lorre for this worship service.

Also, when you listen to the prelude music, you will realize Brad has done some incredible layering of birdsong, flute and organ ... Lorre has set Brad's composition to pictures of our Grand River, and the prelude incorporates our prayer of territorial acknowledgement. You will have to make yourself still and silent in order to hear and notice everything in the piece ☺ It is a beautiful vehicle of praise and thanksgiving, as is our Sending Hymn today, Be Still for the Presence of the Lord – a welcome to the season of Spirit.

I wish the days were longer and my energy reservoir was full, to allow me to reach out to everyone by phone but this has not been possible for me. So please, please know, if you want or need to talk, I am relying on you to reach out to me – we are in a season of a fire fighting model of pastoral care, where I am responding to you rather than having the inner resources to proactively reach out. But everyone is in my heart and my prayers and I am thankful for your emails, texts and notes – every single one ☺

Please remember that, as things are opened up, the COVID-19 virus remains alive and well, and for us to likewise remain alive and well, precautions are advised: safe distancing, avid handwashing and polite consideration of and respect for the fears of others are, at this time, acts of love.

Please exercise these acts of love generously.

Remember also to reach out by telephone, email (church phone 519-653-4721, text or cell call 519-588-7701 or by email pastor@st-peters-cambridge.org) or facebook if you want or need a friendly phone call or a screen door, driveway, porch or deck visit. Please remain connected with each other by telephone – make it your goal this week to call at least one person every day for a telephone visit. You will be blessed, and will be a blessing in the process ☺

- with love, in Christ, Pastor Janaki.

Please take a few moments of silence, prepare your heart,
centre yourself for worship.

Prelude: Land acknowledgement with Brad's creative composition ☺

Click here: <https://youtu.be/X9Zar8-GeUs>

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, in your home and in mine.

Prayer of the Day:

All-Powerful God, you are the author of all creation. You come to us in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, giving us a diversity of ways to access your accompaniment, enter into your riches and walk towards your Kingdom. Please help us and guide us in these days, to follow Jesus' example of listening and heeding the voices on the margins. May we remember and live each day knowing Jesus is our Redeemer and Way-Maker. Amen

The Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:5-13a

Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups. You need firsthand evidence, not mere hearsay, that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it. I hope the test won't show that we have failed. But if it comes to that, we'd rather the test showed our failure than yours. We're rooting for the truth to win out in you. We couldn't possibly do otherwise.

We don't just put up with our limitations; we celebrate them, and then go on to celebrate every strength, every triumph of the truth in you. We pray hard that it will all come together in your lives.

I'm writing this to you now so that when I come I won't have to say another word on the subject. The authority the Master gave me is for putting people together, not taking them apart. I want to get on with it, and not have to spend time on reprimands.

And that's about it, friends. Be cheerful. Keep things in good repair. Keep your spirits up. Think in harmony. Be agreeable. Do all that, and the God of love and peace will be with you for sure. Greet one another with a holy embrace. [The Message Translation]

Word of God, word of life. ***C: Thanks be to God.***

Reading homework:

Psalm 8 & Genesis (Creation story)

Acclamation of the Word:

"Morning Star" The piece was recorded in 2009 for the 175th anniversary of our congregation. It was part of a CD created for the occasion entitled, Remember, Rejoice, Renew." We often sing this song following baptisms at church ☺ It is especially meaningful today when we think of the entry of Spirit ☺

Click here: <https://youtu.be/sNWav0cgSJc>

The Holy Gospel according to Mark 7:24-30.

C: Glory to you O Lord.

Jesus got up and left there and went to the region of Tyre [and Sidon, the coastal area of Phoenicia]. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know *about it*; but it was impossible for Him to be hidden [from the public]. Instead, after hearing about Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet. Now the woman was a Gentile (Greek), a Syrophoenician by nationality. And she kept pleading with Him to drive the demon out of her daughter. He was saying to her, "First let the children [of Israel] be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the pet dogs (non-Jews)." But she replied, "Yes, Lord, but even the pet dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." And He said to her, "Because of this answer [reflecting your humility and faith], go [knowing that your request is granted]; the demon has left your daughter [permanently]." And returning to her home, she found the child lying on the couch [relaxed and resting], the demon having gone. [The Amplified Bible]

The Gospel of our Lord. ***C: Praise to you, O Christ.****

Click here for audio of the sermon: <https://youtu.be/NKbIfD2iefw>

Meditation (imagine Pastor Janaki's voice here):

Before I begin, I want to issue a warning – this message will likely make you extremely uncomfortable. And I want to issue an invitation – when you are done reading or listening, sit with that discomfort quietly for as long as you can, and ask yourself:

- "What is Spirit speaking to you in this discomfort?"
- "What is God, Jesus and the Gospel saying to you in this discomfort?"

And reach out to me to talk with me, make a plan for us to sit together to follow up if you just cannot make any headway of meaning. Because together we will move forward in love – ALWAYS.

I have no difficulty seeing Jesus in the face of the poor, the hungry, the homeless or the addicted. But when someone's ignorance and intentional blindness allows them to be unkind, violent or just plain stupid, I readily confess, I really have a hard time seeing Jesus in them. And when I am hurting or angry, when I am fearful or feeling vengeful, my incapacity to see Jesus in others also becomes somewhat limited. I become the victim of a peculiar kind of blindness in response to blindness which can be very unhelpful.

It is often in these moments that I pull this gospel reading into the forefront of my consciousness, and enter deeply into the scene – to try and realize Jesus is even in those who "just do not get it". To see that Jesus is even in those who do not see or understand the reality of dis-privilege. And also to realize that, no matter what demon possesses me or those for whom I advocate, if I remain humble and faithful, and seek to keep speaking the truth calmly without throwing things, the work of love will prevail.

And so it is that I went completely off lectionary with the Gospel today, to use this story of the beleaguered Syro-phoenecian woman, to enter the discussion on our response to racial dis-privilege, the Black Lives Matter activity in the past 10 days or so, and the untimely death of one George Floyd, under the knees of police officers, supposedly over a counterfeit \$20 bill.

I wonder how many of you watched that video on the news or online? The video of George Floyd's death? The news story described the passing of a counterfeit \$20 bill at a convenience store, and the store owners or workers called the police. When they arrived, they got Mr Floyd, a very tall black man, out of his vehicle and first moved him to the sidewalk. Photos show him sitting on the pavement, leaned up against the wall, cowering. Then they put him in a police car against his protests, and he ended up coming out the other door with three police officers supposedly restraining him (although he was not visibly struggling or fighting them) on the street.

One had a knee to his neck,
the other a knee to his back
and the third a knee to his legs.

Three armed police officers, three knees, restraining one man on the street. Bystanders began videotaping and asking the officers to release him because at some point Mr Floyd stopped moving. At some point he stopped saying he could not breathe. Finally, when the paramedics arrive, they had to ask the police to remove themselves from off the now not moving body of Mr Floyd. He was pronounced dead upon arrival at the hospital.

I resisted watching the video footage until last night, because I was already demon-possessed ... possessed by the deep anger and fear and vitriol of knowing what it is to be a person of colour on this continent. I was already demon-possessed, and I did not want to feed the demon any more. Yet, I made myself watch the video last night because I wanted to honestly be able to ask you what you saw and what you felt if and when you watched it. Then I wanted to tell you what I felt.

So what did you see? What did you feel?

If we were together at church this is the part where I would say "don't all answer at once now" ☺ And you would chuckle, and maybe the first response would float down from the choir loft. And then a few would come from the pews ... as it is, I will go with comments I saw on facebook from acquaintances, friends and colleagues who are white.

These were some of the comments I saw online from my friends and colleagues online, many of whom are white:

"It was horrible"

"It was un-imaginable"

"He called out so many times – I can't breathe"

"He called for his mom"

"It made me so angry"

"It took so long, and the police just would not get off of him"

Here is how it made me feel:

- It made me feel like I was laying there in the road being choked to death.
- It made me feel like no place in this world is safe for someone who looks like me.
- It made me feel like I could not breathe.

It made me feel so angry that for some days I walked around feeling swatches of hatred for people just because they are white. I felt demon possessed. Even as I write this I feel that demon twitching awake. I'm trying to keep my knee on its neck. To cut off its life breathe. To kill it dead. I am not proud of this feeling – but this is how I have felt at times.

The news and the video made me want to throw something, to scream, to shake someone and ask (in a speaking moistly way):

- do you not see that this is systemic? This is not one man or one incident – this is the life of a racially disprivileged person.
- Do you not understand that it does not matter whether I am your pastor or your friend or your colleague, if you are white and I am a person of colour we occupy different worlds because of the assumptions that will be made just because of the colour of our skins?

This week, it was tiring to wear my natural pigmentation. It was exhausting to be a person of colour. This week if I could have swapped my beautiful brown skin for yours, I would have done it in a heartbeat, and I would have walked away leaving my brown skin behind, so that, when this news cycle on racism is over, I too could enjoy the privilege of forgetting about it and moving on to the next thing that will come up to horrify us in the news.

This week's pain and exhaustion made COVID isolation seem like a walk in the park in comparison. This has been my experience ... this is my witness.

So I come to the Syro-Phoenecian woman story as both the woman and her daughter. I feel like I am possessed by the demons of fear and anger and sometimes a vengeful hatred. I feel like I am the mother, coming to plead with a dominant society and a recognized Messiah – I come begging for healing, I come begging for care, I come begging for attention.

Jesus' initial response comes from his privileged position in the society. He is a Jewish man (I realize it might come as a surprise for some folks that Jesus was not a Christian!) and as a Jewish man, and a Jewish leader, he identifies himself as one with a responsibility to first feed the children of Israel, before the dogs are fed. Jesus identifies himself as one of the privileged class of God's chosen people – come to attend to God's chosen people – not the dogs.

Racism was alive and well in Jesus' time, and this was Jesus' blind privilege speaking. We know Jesus did not mean to be unkind, or snotty – as far as he was concerned he was just speaking the truth to this non-Jewish woman. What he had – the safety and healing he could offer were not for her kind of people, only his kind of people.

The woman identifies herself as a dog, and she says even the dogs are passed the scraps from the table. The woman acknowledges the reality of systemic racism and disprivilege, and appeals to the charity that would be extended even to a pet.

Perhaps most important is this: she persists. And she does not even ask for equal treatment to the children of Israel, she asks only for the treatment or care a household pet (versus a stray) might get. In one sense she asks for adoption, even as a lesser member, into the family that eats from the table. She pleads because she does not want her daughter to be possessed by this demon anymore.

I plead because I don't want to be possessed by this demon anymore.

How do the disciples of Jesus respond?

Interestingly, in the Gospel of Matthew rendition of this same scripture, the disciples of Jesus try to shut the woman up, because it seems she has been "shouting after" them for sometime, asking for their attention.

How long has the Black Lives Matter movement been going now?

"And His disciples came and asked Him [repeatedly], "Send her away, because she keeps shouting out after us."¹

Not only did his disciples want to send her away, Jesus himself was going to deny her ...

He answered, "I was commissioned by God *and* sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."²

But the woman persists in faith. She believes in the Messiah, she believes in the Good News of love he bears, and she persists. She believes that even the smallest attention, the slightest crumb from Him will bring deliverance.

And I find myself holding to that. That pleading for the crumb of acknowledgment and action from those Gospel-followers who are race-privileged to bring healing to the situation in which we find ourselves.

¹ From the Gospel of Matthew 15:23 [Amplified Translation]

² From the Gospel of Matthew 15:24 [Amplified Translation]

Many, so many of my white friends have said to me this past week “Oh but I do not see your colour” or “I just see you.” And I have to say these difficult to speak truths:

- if you do not see that you are privileged because you are not being singled out and followed in a store (or not served in a store) because you are racially profiled,
- if you do not recognize your privilege when in a room filled to the overflowing, the seats beside you are filled and the ones that flank me remain empty – people would rather stand.
- if you do not recognize your privilege when I receive disparaging comments about “those immigrants being a burden on society” and you do not hear such comments made about you,
- if you do not recognize your privilege because you’ve never been singled out as a potential terrorist simply because of the colour of your skin,

then you have failed to actually see me.

You have seen the me that fits comfortably for you, but not the system of injustice and oppression within which I walk and breathe and exist. You need to see my colour, and understand that what happens on account of my colour needs healing. You need to see it as demonic. You need to see that this demon possesses me. You need to see that it hurts, and not turn away deftly because I am your friend, your pastor or because you do not see colour.

But I am not going to allow your blindness, systemic blindness to go unchallenged. Like the woman, I will persist. I will plead for the charity you would offer even to a pet – pay attention to what is going on. Something is wrong here – give it even the crumbs of your attention to make it heal.

I take hope in knowing that even Jesus, even Jesus made such oversights. Even Jesus was open to correction. Even Jesus had to be brought up short, brought to attention from this woman on the margins who reminded him of the system that considered her less than human.

And Jesus healed. Jesus heals.

The persistence of the woman with Jesus brings about healing.

So when you hear of protests and riots, when you hear of anger and reactive behaviours, when you hear your pastor going on and on and perhaps making you have all kinds of uncomfortable feelings that make you want her to stop talking – know that you are witnessing the reality of systemic oppression which is demonic in its nature – it has claws and fangs and teeth that cannot readily be removed. And those claws and fangs and teeth are not just

hurting some people in the USA: they hurt me, they hurt indigenous people in Canada, they hurt visible minorities ... they hurt and hurt and hurt.

I appeal to the Christ in you to listen beyond your defensiveness of how not racist you are.

I appeal to the Christ in you to listen beyond the terrible discomfort – whether defensive response, guilt, shame, anger or helplessness – listen beyond the discomfort this makes you feel.

I appeal to the Christ in you to remain present long enough for the protests of the oppressed to be heard, so that the healing that heralds the Kingdom of God can happen.

And He said to her, "Because of this answer [reflecting your humility and faith], go [knowing that your request is granted]; the demon has left your daughter [permanently]." And returning to her home, she found the child lying on the couch [relaxed and resting], the demon having gone.³

I want to be free of this demonic possession of systemic racial oppression – permanently – not just when this news cycle has past.

I want to be a child of God, just like you – lying on the couch, in my own skin – relaxed, unafraid and at peace.

Amen.

Hymn of the Day – Goodness is Stronger Than Evil

Click here: <https://youtu.be/q4u7jaS1uv4>

Prayers of Intercession

In this past week of COVID-19 lockdown, and Black Lives Matter protests, we come before God remembering that all of us are loved, and children of God. We ask God to dwell with us and hear our prayers.

All-powerful God,
Throughout creation, your diversity is demonstrated:
In each face, in every life form,
In each sunrise, in every snowflake.
All the diversity in all your church are, but a sampling of your creative power.
Help us to trust in the innate order of all you have made.
Help us to restore your order, where systems of prejudice prevail
God, dwell with us, and hear our prayer.

Jesus, our brother and fellow traveller,
You intimately know the violence of human encounter with differences.

³ From the Gospel of Mark 7:29-30 [Amplified Translation]

You know what George Floyd experienced in his dying minutes.
 With your body on the cross, these differences were broken:
 Jew and Greek, Slave and free.
 Every shade made precious in your sight.
 Help us to honour your sacrifice by doing the work of your body:
 Help us to dismantle the use of difference for disprivilege.
 God, dwell with us, and hear our prayer.

Holy Spirit of Pentecostal fire,
 You used different tongues to spread the gospel truth.
 Diversity was your vehicle, diversity was your canvas.
 May we trust in your power knit throughout our differences.
 Fill us with your capacity for making common the message of love.
 Let our differences be your chalk and chalkboard.
 Be our guiding presence in this holy work,
 God, dwell with us, and hear our prayer.

In all our hearts, holy One, you place the nudge of your calls.
 You move us in all kinds of ways, with all kinds of concerns.
 Whether for creation, climate or individuals ...
 Whether for the church, the world or local situations ...
 We call out our concerns to you here ... out loud or in the silence of our hearts.
 God, dwell with us, and hear our prayer.

All these things, Lord, we entrust to your care, knowing that you hear all of our prayers. And we pray in the way that Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
 thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread;
 and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;
 and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
 For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. **AMEN.**

While you listen to the offertory song, continue your prayers and consider how you may be an offering in the coming week.

Offertory – Christ Has Arisen - Bradley Moggach, Piano

Click here: <https://youtu.be/gqbD58GJAQk>

Offering Prayer

God of all abundance, receive our brokenness and the offering of our lives.
 Take us, who return to you in thanksgiving: form us and shape us into a love like Jesus, so that we may be love for this broken world. **Amen.**

Sending Hymn: Be Still for the Presence of the Lord

Helga Morrison, soprano

Stephanie Burgoyne, piano

Recorded at Alexandra Presbyterian Church, Brantford, ON

Click here: <https://youtu.be/HAGYMj3gbfU>

Blessing:

May God bless us and keep us.

May the face of God shine upon us with grace and mercy.

May God look upon us with favor

and give us ✝ peace.

Amen.

Dismissal:

Go in Peace, Go in Hope. ***Thanks be to God. ****

Notices about church in time of COVID-19:

- The Public Health & Provincially mandated closure of churches continues. We will continue to keep you updated on Facebook, via website and by telephone, as we are able. Although the church building is closed, voicemail is checked regularly at 519-653-4721 the church number or 519-588-7701 Pastor. Please call if you need a pastoral telephone visit, or if we can help in any way. It is impossible for Pastor to call everyone in turn, so she is relying on you to reach out if you need a call.
- As far as possible, the regular work of the church continues. Lay leaders are meeting using online meeting tools. In the past week, the Risk Management Ministry Team recommendations are under review. We will follow up in the coming week. Our goal is to share information and be "ready to roll" when COVID lockdown is over.
- Bonnie Scott continues to prepare and share information as widely as possible for those who do not have internet access. Brad continues to come in and practice and record. Pastor continues to visit, via telephone, to accompany however possible, and to prepare worship materials. Alex continues to bear the responsibility of treasurer and reminds us that buying and selling maple syrup is a good way to occupy our time 😊
- Thank you for accessing this First Sunday after Pentecost service. When we re-open, we will celebrate in community.
- Please stay in touch with each other. Call each other. Visit on the telephone, and where safe, through closed glass doors, and across fences. Let us know how we can help if you are shut in but need groceries or something delivered. Keep safe, and keep on praying. Think of this time as our time in the tomb, with our Saviour, from which we will be delivered soon 😊 Call Pastor if you need to talk, because she cannot possibly call everyone 😊
- May God bless you and keep you safe ...