

WHAT DAY IS IT?

If I asked you what day it is today, how would you answer? Sunday – June 20th – Father’s Day – Aboriginal Day Sunday – 4th Sunday after Pentecost – World Refugee Day – the Sunday before the Knox Church Picnic Sunday

Today is all of these and perhaps more since for some it may also be a birthday, a wedding anniversary, the beginning of a holiday or a return from adventure, the anniversary of a death or other significant event – what day is it?

I couldn’t decide – so today is one of snippets – bits and pieces that reflect the varying ways we may perceive this day – this moment in our lives and in our journey of faith.

Let’s begin with a prayer for fathers based on The Lord’s Prayer and written by The Rev. Marilyn E. Thornton, a United Methodist from Tennessee:

Our Father who art in heaven, bless the fathers who are on earth – Those who work hard every day to light a path and show the way – Those who forget and don't perceive the devastation when they leave

Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Help the earthly fathers know and praise your name in daily flow – Making no difference between the holy realm and worldly scene

Give us this day our daily bread. And for the dads without a job, strengthen their faith in Provider God. Feed them with the bread of love – the wine of justice – the meat of determination – the fruit of the spirit – that they will remember how Jesus gave himself for us, demonstrating that there are many ways for a MAN TO GIVE.

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Teach each man the ways of peace – Desiring that all violence shall cease – Whether husband/wife, parents/children – Black on black, nation to nation – Neither tongue, hand, gun, knife – No shock and awe, no fiery towers... Help humanity learn HOW TO FORGIVE.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Guide all daddies to be wise. Give them strength of soul to seek the prize of a world without racism or greed – A world where no child is left in need – A world where cheaters cannot win – salvation reigns, there is no sin. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever. **Amen**

And so we applaud fathers today! Father’s Day illuminates and distinguishes fathers as positive role models predicated upon the influence they have on their children and families. It is an opportunity for us to celebrate and salute men who are *handling their business*, providing leadership in their families and in the world, and acknowledging the necessity of having a relationship with God as part of their quest to be good fathers.

Elijah, the prophet from our Hebrew Bible reading today, was a man in relationship with God. In the past two weeks we have heard of his faithful witness and his bravery. Today we learn that like many of us in relationship with God, there are moments of despair when we feel very far from God – moments when we are discouraged and tempted to give up.

There is an old fable that is told about the advertisement that appeared in the newspaper indicating that the devil was putting all his tools up for sale. They would all be laid out for public inspection with the prices marked on them. Those who went there were able to see that some were very treacherous tools indeed – hate, envy, lying, addictions, adultery, murder, etc. And then quite apart from the others lay another one that looked pretty harmless but had an exceptionally high price tag on it, twice as expensive as the others.

Someone asked, “What is the name of this tool, and why is it priced so high?”

The devil answered, “That’s discouragement; it’s so worn because I use it so much...on almost everyone. And it’s priced so high because it has been so very valuable to me. I find it more useful than all the other tools. I can do more with that one than with all the others. I can pry into a person’s heart with that one better than I can with any of the others.”

In addition to the text from First Kings I read an article in *eChannels*, a publication of the Renewal Fellowship within The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It talked about a small group of people recently returned from Cambodia and their experiences in that country. The author writes:

What do you do when you look out the front of the building, knowing that young girls across the road, behind shuttered windows, lie sedated and imprisoned, waiting to be trafficked to anywhere in the world; or when you look out the back of the building to the shanty that has a world-wide reputation in the online pedophile community for providing tiny little girls as young as three or four to meet the sexual desires of men from Canada, America, Sweden, Korea, Germany...? I did not recognize even one little girl from when I was there in 2008. Where were they? I can only assume they have been trafficked to other countries.

What did we do about all this? We painted. Inch by inch, we worked against the evil that sustains this small village. And when I got depressed or overwhelmed, or when that ugly voice in the back of my head chided me that we really were doing nothing of value, that our hard work was a mere speck... then I remembered the songs and shrieks of delighted laughter coming from the happy kids at Rahab's House, and I smiled. And I painted and painted and painted.

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." - Matthew 25:40

This same text from Matthew is one we read this week at our study about refugees. We have been learning so much about the experience of refugees, refugee claimants, migrant workers and immigrants in this study. We now know that today is World Refugee Sunday and we have a better understanding of how the church participates in assisting refugees. Both Presbyterian World Service and Development and Presbyterians Sharing have initiatives in this area. Here is a video that discusses some of that work...

Video about Action Réfugiés Montréal here

Doing important, transformative work in God's name is who we are as Christians – not part of who we are – **all** of who we are.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians he comments on who we are as children of God through faith – as we are baptised we are changed and called to changed expectations in the world. One author I read this week recalled a line from William Blake's poem, *Milton*. I looked up the poem – very long and complex – definitely something for extensive study but the line can help us in our understanding of what it means to live in Christ:

"To bathe in the Waters of Life, to wash off the Not Human"

To wash off the not human – the old law separated some of Paul's readers from outsiders – from others. Hiding behind the old law, they felt a superiority as God's chosen. The law divided them from most of the human race. Yet Paul says that when we are clothed in Christ – when we are washed in the waters of baptism – a strange thing begins to happen. All the old categories, like Jew and Greek and slave and free and male and female, just fall away. To be baptized is to wash off the not human – all the walls that separate us from our brothers and sisters everywhere.

Until we are truly able to *wash off the not human* that separates us from those in need I believe we remain unable to approach the divine. No one is a refugee by choice. Fleeing persecution and conflict, refugees lose their homes, family, friends, work, community and culture. Despite the enormous loss and suffering, refugees persevere to realize a better future. Working together with Presbyterian congregations, PWS&D assists refugees to resettle in Canada through private sponsorship. Let us remember the plight – the strength, courage and hope – of refugees and displaced people around the world. As we *wash off the not human* our humanity is revealed in its fullness – then we can see the child of God in those who are different than we – then we can make a difference.

We know that Jesus made a difference wherever he went – as we seek to follow him we are called to similar acts of compassion and justice. Listen now to part of a reflection on today's passage from Luke offered by The Rev. Marty Molengraaf in recognition of Aboriginal Day:

As Jesus stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him...

Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

He said, "Legion" for many demons had entered him.

The Europeans who came to North America in the 16th century called the Aboriginal peoples who greeted them "Indians" because they thought they had arrived in India. Some also became convinced very quickly that these "Indians" were heathens and that many were possessed by demons. They quickly sought to preach the gospel to them and to "drive the demons out of them." Later, in the residential school-era, "Indian" children were often forbidden to speak their own language, they were dressed in European-style clothes, and they were sometimes called "little red devils."

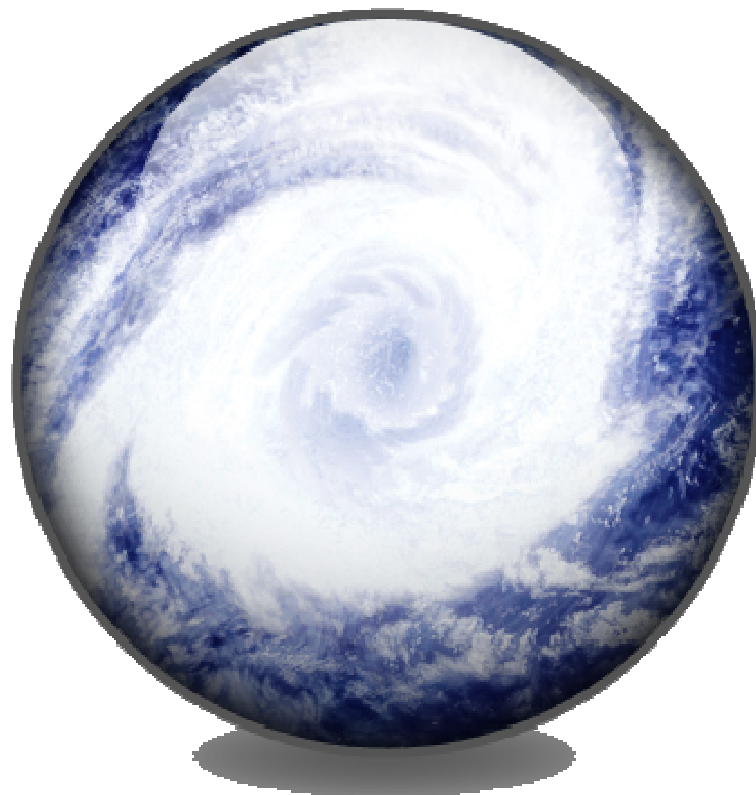
It is time to face the demons that possess us here in Canada today. I imagine Jesus stepping out onto the land called Canada in the year 2010, and an everyday non-Aboriginal man of Canada greeting him. I imagine Jesus asking him, "What is your name?" And in a moment of truth this demon-possessed man responds, "My name is Legion, for we are many. Our name is Racism, Bias, Prejudice, Judgement, Intolerance. Our name is 'May they all go away,' or 'What's wrong with them?', or 'Why can't they be like us?'"

"What is your name?" Jesus asked a man of the city.

"Legion," he said, for many demons had entered him.

May God help us this Aboriginal Day Sunday to drive all the demons away.

If I asked you what day it is today, how would you answer? I know that it is a special day – the Lord's Day and the day that the Lord has made. I know that it is the day we have been given – like so many other days – to make a difference in this world. Whatever you celebrate today may you encounter God as you go. **Amen**



This Sermon Copy reflects the style of the spoken word rather than the written word. Allowances should be made for grammatical style and sentence structure that are characteristic of the spoken word. The Rev. L. T. Kavanagh, 2010