



June 19, 2022

Pentecost 2

1 Kings 19:1-15a Psalm 42,43 Galatians 3:23-29 Luke 8:26-39

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My name is Lyle McKenzie, my pronouns are he/him, Co-Pastor of Lutheran Church of the Cross of Victoria, BC, and Assistant to the Bishop for Worship in the ELCIC. I speak to you from the unceded territory of the ɫə́kʷəŋən people, including the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ nations.

These are wild and wonderful words and stories we hear on this second Sunday after Pentecost, as the church begins the season of learning to love and live as Spirit-filled people of the risen and ascended Christ Jesus for the healing of the world.

The stories are other worldly. If you read the Elijah story from First Kings in your worship, you'll know Queen Jezebel has promised to have Elijah killed by day's end because Elijah took the lives of her prophets. Elijah's on the run, gives up and asks only to die. Angels minister to Elijah, telling him to eat and drink to gain strength for the journey and to be encountered by God. Elijah reluctantly does, returning to the sacred mountain. But there he repeats the same desperate words that he alone is left and about to die. God does not encounter Elijah in a rock-splitting hurricane, not in an earthquake, not in a forest fire, but, in "sheer silence" is the most common translation now. Although, in the past it has included, "a still small voice," or translations I saw recently, "a quiet whisper," or a "faint murmuring" as God "passes by." In sheer silence, a whisper, a murmur, God speaks and says simply: "Go." Go on, Elijah, do what I am calling you to do.

Wild and wonderful encounters by God are what we trust the Spirit is doing on any given Sunday in worship so that we remember God does so anywhere, anytime. We may be on the run, feeling threatened, looking for a haven, wondering if we are going to die. But ministered to

by angels, encouraged to eat and drink at this table, to be strengthened for the journey, we are invited to be encountered by God, maybe not in a hurricane or earthquake or fire, but in sheer silence, only a whisper, a faint murmur, telling us, “Go,” Go on, do what I am calling you to do.

Tomorrow, June 20, is World Refugee Day. Many church communities across the ELCIC, often with neighbouring partners and CLWR or other agencies, have been involved or are involved in sponsoring refugees. The total number of refugees and displaced persons, growing each day especially since the invasion of Ukraine, is a staggering 85+ million. Over 35+ million are children. The number of people in need is overwhelming. But there are many, many, stories of people coming to this land sponsored by ELCIC church communities, stories of lives changed forever, of families reunited, of new friendships formed, of safety, security, education, opportunity. Not without significant challenges and more we need to do to welcome new people to these lands and address the prejudices and racism that are present and impact newcomers, and those for whom this has been their home for generations and for time immemorial. Together, these acts of love and hope change lives, all our lives and the communities in which we live for good, for God’s good purpose. Go, do what God is calling us, calling you to do for the sake of refugees and the communities of which we are a part, that all would have a safe home, as God desires.

That’s the wild and wonderful story of the man from a city of the Gerasenes who meets Jesus as Jesus and the disciples land in the country. We heard his wild circumstances, living in caves, unclothed and unable to be bound, out of his right mind. The Bible’s way of describing his condition is possession by demons, “legion” in number and name. It is interesting to note that there was a Roman legion of soldiers stationed in the land of the Gerasenes, making us wonder if the man’s possession reflects the possession of these lands and all the people by a legion of Roman occupiers? Similarly tormented day and night, with attempts to bind and chain them that ultimately fail. And the tormenters know who Jesus is. In a wild encounter with Jesus, the legion of demons plea for their lives, asking to go into a herd of pigs. Animals unclean to the Jewish community, are they there to feed the occupiers? Jesus gives them permission and they run the pigs off the cliff to drown. Those charged with caring for the pigs are understandably shocked and worried, as are others in the community who hear and go out to see the wild things that have been happening and find the formerly demon-possessed man sitting with Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And in what we can imagine are but quiet words, Jesus tells him, “Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.” And he does so throughout the whole city, telling others how much Jesus has done for him.

Tuesday is Indigenous People’s Day on these lands. And just over two weeks ago was the anniversary of recovering the remains of 215 children on the grounds of the former Kamloops Residential Institution. And more and more children’s remains are being located elsewhere across these lands. The process of Truth and Reconciliation continues, with recognition that there is still much of the truth being uncovered about the attempted genocide of the Indigenous peoples of this land. And that “reconciliation”—a complicated word that can be difficult, even maddening for some Indigenous people, wondering when was there a relationship between first peoples and the colonizers of these lands to which anyone wishes to return;

and when does truth lead to concrete actions for justice and redress and effective changes for the healing and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples, and right relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples with and in care for these lands?

At the BC Synod Study Conference in May, retired Anglican Indigenous Bishop Barbara Andrews from the Territory of the People was our presenter. She spoke to us about the pathways to reconciliation as a spiritual journey that includes “Truth Telling” over “cultures of lies and silence;” “Healing of Memories” that include “coming to terms with the past, removing its poison, mourning and finding a different, non-toxic narrative;” “Pathways to Forgiveness,” including “power passing to the victim, and the survivor choosing the direction for the future;” and “Pursuit of Justice,” including “restorative justice, systemic change, and redress.” Through sharing and storytelling in all of this, Bishop Barbara repeated, “it is about relationships, relationships, relationships.” And she spoke also about those who are “reconcilers” in our communities, those able to draw people together toward God’s true healing. I wonder about the image of the person sitting beside Jesus and in their right mind. Is this an image for us, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, whole and restored to land and community together?

Jesus says to them, “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” Go, go on, do what God is calling us, calling you, to do for truth and reconciliation together.

Maybe the wildest words today are those of Paul to the Galatians, and to Christian communities ever since. Paul writes:

...in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Wild! Wonderful words! All of us, beyond every difference and division, are one in Christ.

The ELCIC has had three task forces meeting since the National Convention in 2019, on Racism; Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia; and Ableism. Each has reported to the National Church Council, making recommendations on how the ELCIC can address systemic and structural issues of exclusion of minority persons and take action toward greater inclusion and justice and right relationships together, as one people in Christ. The work has been difficult with great thanks to all involved. And the recommendations will be challenging and require openness, honesty, acceptance, and willingness to give our best efforts toward the vision of the church that Paul articulates for us. And realizing this vision is only possible, not by law and punishment, but by love and accountability and grace through faith in Christ.

I imagine, even as we gather this morning, and listen, that in a whisper, a murmur, or in the sheer silence, that God/Jesus/the Spirit, is calling us now, calling you now, to go, go on, do what God is calling us, calling you to do, in grace through faith in Christ Jesus, in the Spirit’s wild and wonderful moving toward welcome and inclusion and healing and wholeness and truth and reconciliation and homecoming all together. Go... and let it be so, in all our relations. Amen.