

FROM THE INSIDE OUT

June 2, 2019
Easter 7 - last
[John 17:20-26](#)
[Acts 16:20-34](#)

(prayer)

My great nephew (my sister's grandson) is the only member in my extended family of *that* generation, so he gets lots of attention - deservedly so.

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My niece posted a [memory](#) on Facebook the other day. It was a video of her (then) 18 month old son, sitting in a small child's pool playing with a plastic boat and a rubber ducky.

I can't believe this was 2 years ago already!

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The fun part is not so much the visual: he's not violently splashing around or anything; it is the audio. He is calmly speaking - responding to questions and laying out his truth.

At 18 months old, he knew only a few words and could make his thoughts known when necessary. But in this video he is speaking in full complex sentences.

Of course, at that age, it comes in to our ears as just toddler gibberish.

(example)

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In his mind, I have to believe that he thinks that he as talking, he is being understood.

He is mimicking what *he believes* conversations are *supposed* to sound like. He is copying the inflections and rhythms of speech - even if he has yet to figure out how to form the precise words.

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This is endemic of how we learn.

We observe our environment and context. We watch, we listen and we reflect on the information we take in. We begin learning by mimicking what we see and hear.

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But learning is more than accepting input from outside. We expand our learning as we practice what we experience.

My great nephew Conner may not have been sharing words we can understand, but he was practicing sharing words.

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We expand our learning as we practice what we experience.

In fact, we are created - each of us - with a capacity for cynicism. We don't necessarily accept the input offered by others at face value. We test what we experience and discover what is *true for us...* which might (in the end) confirm what we were shown or can be very different from others had offered.

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One summer, I worked as a waiter in a restaurant where most of the main courses were served on plates that had been warming in an oven. It was part of the normal server spiel, as I placed the food in front of a patron, to say

Be careful; the plates are hot!

Not a shift went by without someone needing to test the truth of my statement out for themselves.

Ouch! You're right.

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I did try to hide any eye-rolling in the moment.

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We are not created already finished. From our first breath we being to take in the bounty of the earth and the fullness of opportunity.

Unless and until our capacities are muted by ailment or extreme age, not a day goes by from childhood on out when we can't discover a new insight to add to our wisdom in ways that increasingly make sense for us.

We are made to be life long learners.

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The gospel of John is (intentionally) unique compared to the other three narratives of Jesus' life in many ways. A close look at the text shows us that on the evening of Jesus' arrest, *while Matthew, Mark and Luke focus on Jesus' time of private prayer in a garden and the meal shared by Jesus and his disciples*, John focuses on a foot washing ceremony and a [time of teaching and spoken prayer](#) by Jesus addressed to his disciples. This takes up [five full chapters](#) of the fourth gospel: from chapter 13 through chapter 17. If you have one of those bibles where the modern publishers printed the quotations of Jesus in a different colour, you will see that most of those chapters are *red*... The [synoptic gospels](#) tell us about a last supper; John tells us about a last teaching.

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What we heard today was the end of this *farewell discourse* - the end of a chapter-long pastoral prayer spoken by Jesus. In the verses immediately preceding today's passage, Jesus prays that his followers will continue to live into the God's truth that Jesus has shared with them, even though this may not make them popular in the world.

Our passage today... extends that prayer to future followers who would hear this gospel shared by Jesus' disciples.

Jesus prays for a unity among his followers.

Jesus prays to God "that they may all be one... that the love which God has for Jesus, may also be in the followers."

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On the screen is the current version of the [United Church of Canada crest](#).

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During the announcement slides before church each Sunday, there is one that explains the various symbols.

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The Crest has been updated a couple of times since 1925. It's more colourful now, it's multilingual.

A representation of the original version is on one of our stained glass windows (at the back on the left).



But, one of these things that has been there from the beginning is the Latin phrase (now along the bottom left): *ut omnes unum sint*.

It is a quote from today's gospel reading -- John 17:21 "that all may be one" --- *ut omnes unum sint*!

It seemed a very appropriate prayer for the UCCan as it was forming from the unity of three founding denominations at the turn of the 20th century, but - as we read today - it is ***the*** founding prayer of the Christian church from before it called itself that.

Jesus prayed: *I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me*

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through their word, that they may all be one. ... I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

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A couple of weeks ago we heard the story of Simon Peter expanding his view about how big the church could be when he saw the same spirit he had known active in his familiar circles also active among people he considered foreign, even unrighteous.

I now realize (how true it is) that God does not show favoritism. (Acts 10:34)

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We heard another story from Acts today. This one involving Silas and Paul in Philippi, which is a city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.

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As the Seasons of Spirit curriculum materials reminded me this week: our Acts reading today is more than a story of a divine jail break and more than a story of the main, well known, characters ---- liberating love is experienced by the unnamed, peripheral characters. It is a story of goodness not for the few but for the many; not just for the well known, but for the unknown as well.

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Paul and Silas were jailed for being disturbers of the peace. Actually, they damaged one of the Philippians' business with an odd act of healing.

If we had started our reading a few verses earlier, we would have heard that there was a woman (a slave-girl) who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul, she would cry out, 'These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.' She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place before the authorities.

It is an odd healing story.

Paul doesn't heal her to release her from some controlling supernatural spirit; he doesn't seek to free her from her servitude; he wasn't motivated to reform the economic systems of the Roman world; he probably wasn't even bothered by what the woman was saying: she was a walking commercial for them: *these people are servants of the most high who proclaim a way salvation.*

It appears that Paul was simply annoyed because she was persistently loud.

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As we heard... the healing of the *cash cow slave girl* led to accusations of being foreign preverters of proper custom. After their day in court, Paul and Silas were beaten... and locked up deep inside the local prison.

This didn't seem to have dampened their spirits because, in the middle of the night they were awake praying and singing. We know that the other prisoners could hear them, but they may have been too deep into the prison to bother the sleeping jailer and his family in their nearby residence.

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But... a natural disaster woke everyone up.

An earthquake shook the foundations of the prison... so much so that the doors came off their hinges and the chains and stocks were no longer fastened to the walls. It was literally a *jail break*.

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When the jailer saw that the jail doors were breached, he assumed that the prisoners had

escaped (I mean, why wouldn't they?).

From what the Acts' text tells us, we assume that this jailer was going to bear the full blame for the jail break... the punishment he knew was coming his way must have been so severe, that the jailer was choosing to end his own life before any of his superiors found out that he had allowed the prisoners to escape on his watch.

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From the depths of captivity, came a liberating voice: *Do not harm yourself! We are all here!*

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The grace and love of God moved out from the innermost prison cell into the jailer's heart, and later, into the hearts of his family and home. The jailer's and his family's story in Acts ends the next morning, but we have to imagine that, through them, the grace and love of God continued to move outward.

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Jesus wanted the love inside him (that is God's love) to move out into his group of followers, and from them out to generations of new followers.

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They'll know we are Christians by our love!

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When we take *that* seriously, not only will the followers of Jesus find unity, but we will see that beyond our own well-defined barriers: ALL may be one!

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Treaty Talk last night. We started with guidelines for the sharing circle, including:

- We will listen to each other
- We will not judge
- We will respect different opinions
- We will allow space for everyone to speak
- We will remember our ancestors, future relations, and those unable to join
- We will keep in mind that love is the most important

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- "June" is Pride  Month (in most places) as a commemoration of spontaneous and violent demonstrations by members of the gay community that followed a police raid of NYC's Stonewall Inn on June 28, 1969: the fiftieth anniversary of that pivotal event is coming up in a few weeks.

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A dozen of us met after church one Sunday last month to talk about how proud we want to be (as a church) that are fully welcoming of people of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

This group and I are honestly interested in learning: *How willing are we to openly affirm that inclusiveness as part of our identity?*

Please talk to me and each other about this.

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Today, we come to Jesus' table:

- unfettered,
- unguarded,

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- un-bordered.

We do this inspired by Jesus' prayer that the Love of God is in us and that (no matter any else about us) makes us ONE!

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Let us share this message with the world by mimicking Jesus.

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Let us pray:

Holy God,

You are the centre of our hope and promise. We pray that your loving Spirit will inspire and guide us in all that we do. Amen.

offering