

# *St James United Church*



## Message for October 6, 2024 World Communion Sunday

“Sent into the World” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Numbers 11:24-30; and Mark 5:1-19

I'd like to share an experience that speaks to why we're here on this World Communion Sunday, especially with all that's going on in the Middle East, the world, Canada. I was in the chapel at Queen's College. It was a communion service, quiet, reflective, but someone had opened a window. At first there was just a slight buzz in the background as we sang and prayed. But just as the communion prayer began, the outside noise started getting louder and louder. There was a protest taking place, students chanting, using megaphones and such. It struck me as an interesting interplay between prayer and protest. Then someone closed the window. That too struck me as interesting, perhaps even a bit telling.

And so, I invite you to ponder that. We opted to focus on communion as the world spoke to us through the window. Now to be clear, in this I've no judgement on the person who closed the window. In the moment it was the right thing to do, but at the same time it seemed a powerful illustration of where we're at sometimes as church, made more so as I reflected on Mark's gospel, and not just today's portion but prior as well. If you recall in last week's text, Jesus was visiting someone's home, likely sharing food, and then his family came to see him. Rather than go out to them, he turned to the people gathered around the table and said they were his family. It's poignant, and if the gospel story ended there, then why not gather for communion and shut not just windows but the door as well?

But the narrative doesn't end there. Instead, it continues with Jesus outside on a beach, teaching a crowd about God's way, then in today's portion gets in a boat and crosses the lake into Gentile territory where he frees a person who is tormented by demons. In this he is showing us what he meant last week about following God's way, that following God's way is more than just praying together. Now don't get me wrong. It's important to pray together, especially for communion, but as we see in Jesus, it's not the end goal. We share at the table to grow in relationship with him, to take on his heart at a deeper level. And his heart led him out the door. He did what we all do when we gather. He brought the world with him as he prayed, and then spiritually nurtured, went into the world, not shutting the world out as we share communion but hearing the world, bringing it to God, and God gracing us to respond.

And note here that this is an us response and not just a me response. This for me is the thrust of the Numbers reading. The context is again a meal, or lack of one, as people complain they don't have meat. Moses complains too, complains to God about their complaint. But God responds by

giving seventy elders a share in Moses' spirit, so all begin to prophesy, and only then gives the people an abundance of quail. In this the need isn't met until it is more than just Moses doing it. And the same is true of our call as church. We're fed together then sent out, and you especially as the world is where you do most of your work, my role to feed you spiritually so that strengthened as beloved children of God and as a community in Christ, you make present the love, compassion, forgiveness, justice and peace nurtured in our prayer together, and then share it in all that you do in the world.

As we look again at our gospel, the world needs these gifts that God invites us to bring. Consider what we heard, like how the possessed man was chained up by his community, ostracized instead of helped, or how the demon called itself Legion, a group of Roman soldiers, suggesting there's more than just personal liberation in play, or how after this Jesus would facilitate social liberation when he returned to his patriarchal home territory, healing a woman who was perpetually haemorrhaging, so considered unclean, and then raising a tween girl from the dead. There is in this an undercurrent that the help we're to offer needs more than prayer or immediate charity but takes discernment, social analysis as we address the roots of the needs we see and not just the needs themselves.

And to do this we draw on three things we do in worship. First we show hospitality, that is treat the people in our schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces with caring concern, with open hearts to tend to their needs. Then we listen. A few years ago, it became popular for churches to encourage their members to walk their neighbourhoods and pray for the people they saw, met, spoke with, to pray for what they saw going on, the needs they noticed. I think this is a good practice and encourage it. But in tandem with this we need to do something else we do in church, to listen. We listen to what is going on and see where God is already doing amazing things and come alongside those. To consider as well what people are saying as we wander, and so not dismiss them out of hand, or assume we know the answer, but listen more deeply, not just to discern what the underlying needs are, although that is the case, but to deepen the relationships and so do that work together, to do so in support and solidarity, and not as a saviour and not really help at all. And through all this is prayer, grounding something else we do in church - service, doing things with and for each other – and so placing our neighbours' needs in God's power more than in our own.

With everything going on in our world right now, it is tempting to close the window, to withdraw in prayer as a community out of fear of the conflicts, and climate crises, the cost of living, the list goes on. But we can't, not if we're attentive to what prayer is about, what communion is about. We need to hear the world as we pray, listen as we share communion, bring the world's needs into God's heart and our hearts, and then from being nourished in communion and prayer, bring God's heart and our hearts to the world. May we do just that today and every time we come together. Amen.