

BECOMING TOGETHER:

Toward The
Beloved
Community

A WALK THROUGH GALATIANS AND ANTI-RACISM



Session 3

INTRACTABILITY OF RACE & SYSTEMIC RACISM



When I think more deeply about race, I know conceptually that race is a social construct. At the core, we are all human beings, and in that way, we are all the same. But there is something about race that separates and divides, no matter what mythology about multiculturalism we like to believe.

Race, although a social construct, has real-life implications, particularly for those who are racialized, and most particularly for those who are black or indigenous.

We are focusing mainly on anti-black racism, because in our region - the Greater Toronto Area - black people are a very large population.

There were 442K black people in the Toronto census area in 2016. That's 40% of Canada's black population, and 7.5% of the GTA population. It's a very large number.

This is not a sociology presentation, so I don't have all the charts, numbers and facts with me, but I know from previous reading and professional experience, that black people are disproportionately involved with the child welfare system, disproportionately suspended from schools, disproportionately arrested in the criminal justice system, disproportionately stopped by police officers, segregated physically into more impoverished geographic areas, and so much more.

I think the undeniable fact is that for many black people, the colour of their skin does lead to differential treatment of various sorts.



THE SAFETY OF DISTANCE

Many people are genuinely of goodwill, and don't have conscious or intentional animus toward black people.

But most often, this is the result of a safe distance and separation from regular, daily interactions with black people, especially those who live in segregated areas of the city.

From this distance, we can express empathy and goodwill for them.



I would say that this distance and separation is not necessarily intentional and conscious on our part. They are fuelled by what are on the surface non-racial considerations: good neighbourhoods, good schools, safety, location - I will call these things “factors of desirability.”

These factors of desirability have literally and physically structured our society and region. Those who have been able to successfully access these factors of desirability have clustered together in these desirable neighbourhoods, while those who cannot have been clustered in those less desirable neighbourhoods.

A KEY QUESTION THEN IS:

What shapes and creates these factors of desire?



NORMATIVE FACTORS THAT SHAPE WHAT IS DESIRABLE

I argue that there are normative factors that shape what is desirable. In other words, factors of desirability are shaped by the norms we espouse.

These norms may indeed stem from our human nature, but they are shaped by the discourse that takes place in our communities, in the media, among family members, friends and co-workers.

Some key questions for us in this study of Galatians are:

1. Can we de-center these normative factors?
2. Can our norms, and therefore our desire, be shaped and re-formed by our life in Christ?

Let's think of it this way as well: under our normative factors.



WHAT WOULD IT TAKE FOR BLACK PEOPLE TO BE CONSIDERED “ACCEPTABLE”?

Behavioural
changes to
behave like “us”?

Changes to
family?

Education?

Jobs and career?

Let us think frankly and honestly: if black people are a minority and adapted to the majority culture, is that when we are comfortable with them? What if we are in a majority-black setting? Do we feel at ease? Have we even put ourselves in that situation? And if not, why not?

What if it were our children: would we be okay having them in a majority black setting? What sorts of immediate thoughts would enter our minds, or what feelings would we feel? What if they started dating someone black?

If we are honest, can we not say that our norms have been shaped by white normativity, and that there is an unconscious bias against what is black? That there is an innate suspicion against black people?



EFFECT OF DOMINANT NORMATIVITY ON MARGINALIZED GROUPS

Have we as a society enslaved black people under the norms of our society, which as discussed in Session 1, are governed by the standards of white normativity?

At the most physical level: black people are targeted - it was a known fact based on data that black people are many times more likely to be stopped and pulled over by police than non-black people, even when there is no active criminal investigation ongoing.



That was the whole issue with carding: random stops on the street by the police and recording personal information about the individual.

This especially targeted black male youths, and contributed to corrosive relations between the youth of black communities and police. Their skin colour and neighbourhood of residence deviated from white normativity. They were attributed with perceptions of greater criminality, and they were therefore viewed with suspicion.



This differentiation and treatment with suspicion takes place in many other areas of life too. Schools, social welfare systems, employment.

FACTORS THAT ARE OPPOSITE OF FACTORS OF
DESIRABILITY IN WHITE NORMATIVITY ARE ATTRIBUTED
TO BLACK PEOPLE. THERE ARE DUAL POLARITIES.

Educated vs Uneducated

Proper behaviour vs. Improper Behaviour

Lawful citizens vs. Lawless

Trusted vs. To be feared

When these factors are combined, there becomes embedded in societal imagination a set of norms that are deviant from the accepted norms. This manifests in systemic disadvantage for black people.

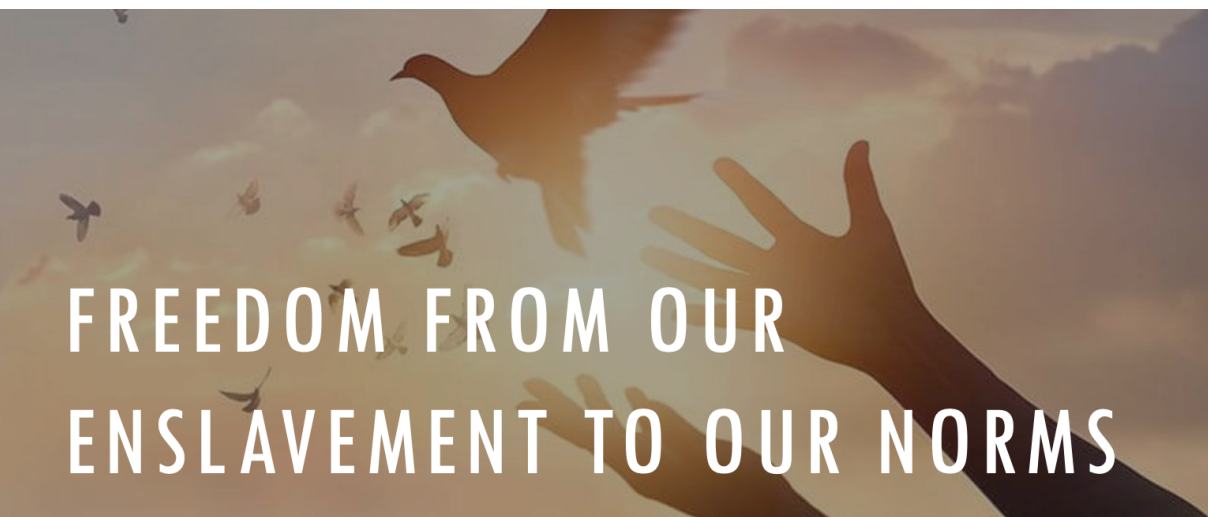
These polarities are similar to how the Galatians were construed by the dominant Roman power. In the Roman imagination, the Galatians represented those negative aspects of the dual polarities.

What are the effects of this dominant white normativity on marginalized groups, and especially the black population?



Are we not, to use Paul's language, keeping black people enslaved to our norms of white normativity?

In history, black people were literally and physically enslaved. But now, through our systems of policing, education, social welfare, employment, residential discrimination and segregation, and the collective apparatus of society, are we not keeping black people economically, socially and perhaps spiritually enslaved?



In our church's long study of the Bible, we have learned that freedom begins with freedom in our minds and hearts. Spiritual freedom is paramount.

This is what Viktor Frankl discovered when he was a captive in the concentration camps of Germany during World War II. People may not have control of their physical and social circumstances, but they can find freedom in their minds and find meaning in life nonetheless.

This is what the Galatians experienced when Paul came with the gospel.

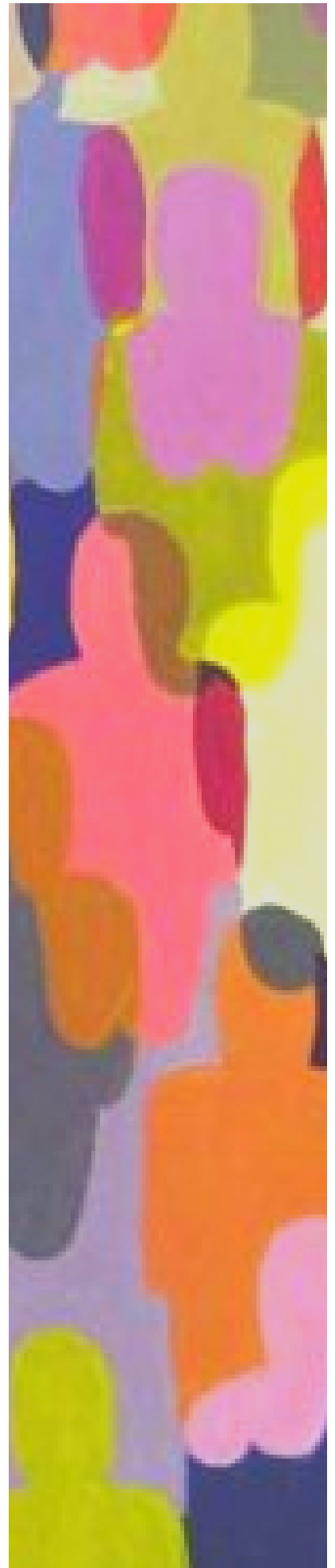
They found spiritual freedom from the enslavement to Roman normativity - a normativity that kept them perpetually as the suspicious Other.

We learn in chapter 3 that the Galatians “*received the Spirit...*”, they “*started with the Spirit*” and “*experienced so much*” (Galatians 3:2-3). They experienced the power of the Spirit of Christ. This Spirit “*worked miracles*” among them (Galatians 3:5).

It was a powerful experience of freedom in Christ. Paul came to them with some kind of physical infirmity - some interpreters translate it as deformity - but Paul recount that the Galatians “*did not scorn or despise me, but welcomed me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.*” (Galatians 4:14)

The experience they had and the bond that was formed through this experience was so tight that Paul believes they “*would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.*” (Galatians 4:15).

They heard the message and came to believe that in Christ, they were loved and that in Christ, God gave his life for them. They and Paul were spiritually bonded by this powerful experience they had in the Spirit.



GALATIANS LOSING SIGHT OF THE FREEDOM THEY FOUND IN CHRIST



But now they seemed to have lost sight of this.

"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? ... Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so much for nothing?" (Galatians 3:2-4)

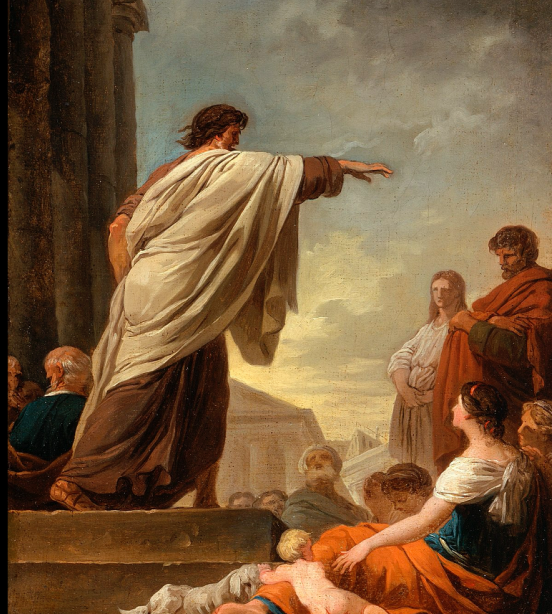
And then again: "What has become of the goodwill you felt? ... My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, I wish I were present with you now and could change my tone, for I am perplexed about you." (Galatians 4:15, 19-20)

The issue was this: they had found freedom from the norms of Roman normativity, and all the negative connotations and mental and spiritual enslavement that entailed, but had now reverted to a new enslavement, this time under Jewish norms.

These two chapters (3 and 4) describe some of Paul's own journey to freedom from his own enslavement to those prior Jewish norms.


JEWISH NORMS

PAUL'S JOURNEY TO FREEDOM FROM ENSLAVEMENT TO JEWISH NORMS



Paul recounted in chapter 1 how he had been so zealous for the traditions of his ancestors. He had been the epitome of one who lived by the Jewish norms. His whole existence had been staked on the upholding and preservation of those norms. That is why he persecuted the church so much, because the church was deviating from those norms.

But the revelation he received from God radically broke his way of thinking and disrupted his norms.



CENTRALITY OF THE TORAH IN JEWISH NORMATIVITY

Central to the issue of Jewish normativity that Paul is speaking so strongly against is the centrality of the Torah, or Law.

The Galatians were told that to be proper believers in Christ, their new life had to be subsumed under the norms of Jewish belief, and at the center of that was the Torah. And the clearest manifestation of the Torah's norms was male circumcision.

But what Paul believed now is that Christ has become the center and de-centered everything else, including the Torah. This was such a radical move. This was why he was persecuted, opposed and almost killed by fellow Jews many times.

I MENTIONED IN SESSION 1 THAT GALATIANS IS FULL OF DUAL POLARITIES. IN CHAPTERS 3 AND 4, HERE ARE SOME OF THE KEY POLARITIES:

Law vs. Promise

Curse vs. Blessing

Flesh vs. Spirit

Slavery vs. Freedom

Captivity vs. Liberation

Imprisonment to sin vs. Adoption

Guardianship vs. Fullness of Time

Progression vs. Radical Break Human

History vs. Divine Narrative

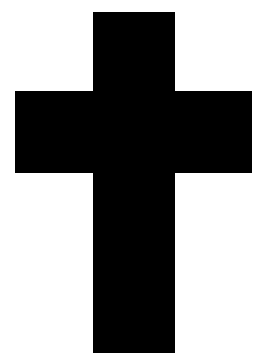
ALL OF THESE ARE POLARITIES IN JUST THESE TWO CHAPTERS! I WILL TRY TO MAKE CLEAR WHAT THESE MEAN.



The most explicit juxtaposition is between the promise and the law. The law was central in the life of Jews. The law was synonymous with the Exodus, which was etched in their psyche. This was the central event that characterized who they were as Jews. The law was given in the aftermath of this Exodus, and was to be their guide in life. Moses was the God-ordained mediator through whom the law was given. The law, Moses and this Mosaic tradition were sacred and central to the life and identity of the Jews.

But now, Paul is radically de-centering the law and the whole Mosaic tradition.

Christ is the new center.





Many of the Jewish Christians believed in a progression in history of the covenant that God had made with the people of Israel, and that Jesus was the climax of the covenant. This progression played out in the real-life history of the Jews. Therefore, there was continuity in history starting with Abraham, the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. To believe in Christ was to place oneself within that stream of human history - the history of the Jewish people. This is why they believed the Galatians needed to become full Jews.

But Paul believes Christ constitutes a radical break with this history, and is in fact not part of that human history at all. Rather, Christ is part of a Divine Narrative that is above and beyond human history.

This divine narrative was given birth in the promise to Abraham. Christ is the incarnated seed of this promise given to Abraham.



So Paul de-centers the Law, and makes the promise and divine narrative the new center. Christ is the complete expression of this promise that was given to Abraham. Christ has come *“in the fullness of time”* (Galatians 4:4).

And the way to access this promise is not by allegiance to the Law, which he describes as part of human history, but rather by faith - believing the promise. That is what Abraham did, and that is what we are to do - believe in the new life made possible by Christ.

Paul does not view the Law itself as a bad thing: *“Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not!”* (Galatians 3:21). But to Paul, the Law was a temporary necessity, as a guardrail against the sinfulness of humanity. *“Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came.”* (Galatians 3:24)



But that law, while more of a necessary thing to guard against the excesses of human nature, did not nullify the promise made to Abraham.

And in the Divine Narrative, the inheritance of this promise would go not to those under the Law, but to those who have faith in the promise, now made complete by Christ.

The Law could only guard against the excesses of Sin, but could not make one righteous. The Law could not free one from the power of Sin.

This is why the Law actually became a curse. The Law revealed the shortcomings of all of our efforts: *“For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written,” “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.”* Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law... *“Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.”* (Galatians 3:10-12)



The Law, then, is an oppressive reminder of our enslavement to Sin. Only in Christ are we freed from that curse: *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us... in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles (nations), so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”* (Galatians 3:13-14)

Do you see how these polarities are playing out?

The Law was like a temporary period of guardianship. I used to do some wills and estates law. When someone is a minor, they are under the authority of a guardian. Paul likens this to being the status of a slave.

“Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until the law came.”
(Galatians 3:23-24)

But in Christ that curse has been transformed into a blessing.

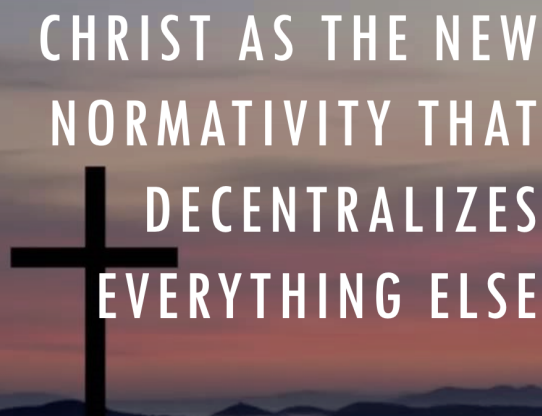


He uses the allegory of Hagar and Sarah: the two women by which Abraham had children. Hagar represents the path of human history: as you know, when Sarah couldn't conceive, she had Abraham go into Hagar to have a child through her.



Hagar represents the empirically sound path, the logical path, the path one could see. This is the path of the flesh, of human history, and this is the path of the Law.

Sarah, on the other hand, represents the path of the promise. Their son, Isaac, represented the child of the promise. The promise is the path that is not readily seen through human eyes or by human history. It does not conform to empirical realities. It is something birthed by divine initiative. The promise represents the Divine Narrative. The good news is that this Divine Narrative has now become a reality in Christ.



So what is the implication of all of this?

Basically, there is nothing anyone can really do to attain worth in God's eyes. Rather, one's worth is affirmed in the love of God shown through Christ. This is the promise of God: God grants the Spirit to those who have faith, those who believe in God's love for them.

This promise is not restricted to certain peoples, based on ancestry or other valuations of worth. It is available to all on the basis of faith.

Everyone is now "clothed" with Christ. So the real implication for Paul is that there is now one community in Christ that is not differentiated from previous markers of difference: *"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. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."* (Galatians 3:28-29)

CHRIST AS THE HERMENEUTIC KEY BY WHICH WE RE- INTERPRET OUR VALUES, NORMS AND WAY OF LIFE

Prior to the revelation he received, to Paul there was a definite Jew and Greek. All were not one.

But in Christ, he realized that these markers of difference were fundamentally and radically altered into a unity. This unity did not entail uniformity. His point was that the Galatians did not need to become like Jews, nor did the Jews need to disavow the Law and their Jewishness. Each could retain their distinctiveness, but their unity was found in the common experience of Christ, who was God's love given to all regardless of their worth.

In Christ, they received and experienced the Spirit, and in the Spirit each experienced life-changing newness.



In Christ, Paul's values, norms and way of life were radically altered. They weren't just tweaked or incrementally changed - there was a complete rupture of his thought and way of living. In this way, the Spirit had invaded his life and led to a complete break from the way he thought and lived in the past.

Through the Christ experience, he re-interpreted his whole faith and beliefs. Only from the vantage point of the Spirit could he come up with the comparisons of Law and Promise. No one, to my knowledge, had made this type of distinction before. If anything, Law was seen as a historical progression of the Promise, a continuity ordained by God. But through his experience in Christ, he saw a disjuncture between the two.

Christ was the central key by which he re-interpreted his life, his values, his norms and how he would live.



QUESTION 1

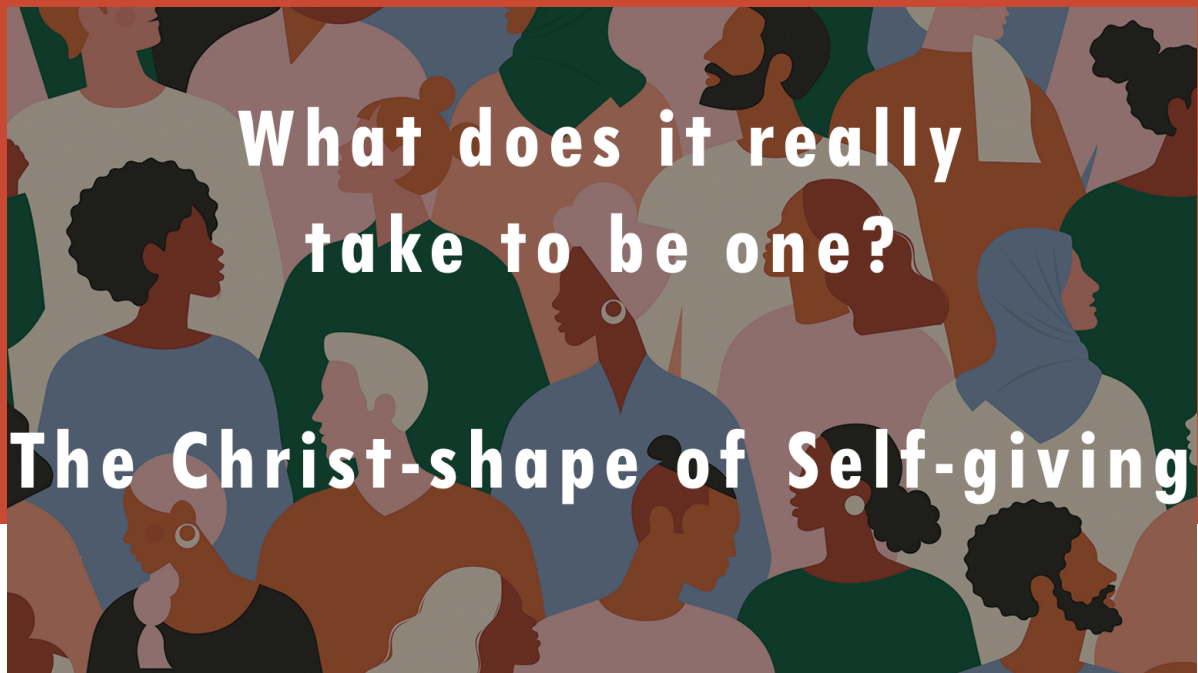
Has Christ and his Spirit invaded our lives in such a way as to radically disorient our previous views and ways of life and lead us into a new life and way of thinking and living?

QUESTION 2

Is not our calling as a church to live into this Spirit who radically transforms and alters the way we think, see the world and act in it?

QUESTION 3

Would this invasion of the Spirit into our lives not lead us to envision our calling in this racially stratified society in fundamentally new ways?



What does it really take to be one? How does this look or work itself out in real-life practice?

Paul's approach to the Galatians offers hints. And so do his writings in other letters.

Take the comparisons he makes in that grand verse: Jews and Greeks. Slave and free. Male and female. In each of these polarities, there is a stronger party and a weaker party. They are not equal at the onset from the normative standards of their world.

What does it take for a stronger and weaker party to be one?

The stronger party has to be willing to relinquish their power and privilege. The weaker party must find a sense of empowerment, dignity and worth.

CHRIST-SHAPE OF SELF-GIVING

In our human society, if you think carefully about it, the onus often falls upon the weaker party to do that latter work. “Try harder, study harder, grind it out”, etc. And when they fail to do so, we blame them.

But in St. Paul’s new thinking, he places the onus on the stronger party. They are to relinquish their privilege and power for the purpose of lifting up the weaker.

“On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:22-26)



This thinking is not just his own philosophy that he developed. It comes from a life that is intimately in Christ, in the Spirit. I mentioned in Session 1 how this language of “in Christ” is so prevalent in Paul’s thought.

Christ was not just nice language - it was his true reality. His whole life took shape in Christ, and it was shaped by Christ, by who Christ was.

He used the words “*clothed yourselves with Christ*”. Elsewhere he says the “*aroma of Christ*”. In other words, his whole being, thinking and action was rooted in Christ and who Christ was.



Some theologians came up with these words:

Christoformity and **Christopraxis**.

Our lives are to take the shape of Christ - in conformity with how he lived, and in practice of how he lived.

The ultimate shape of Christ's life was that of self-giving. And this new community was to take this shape.

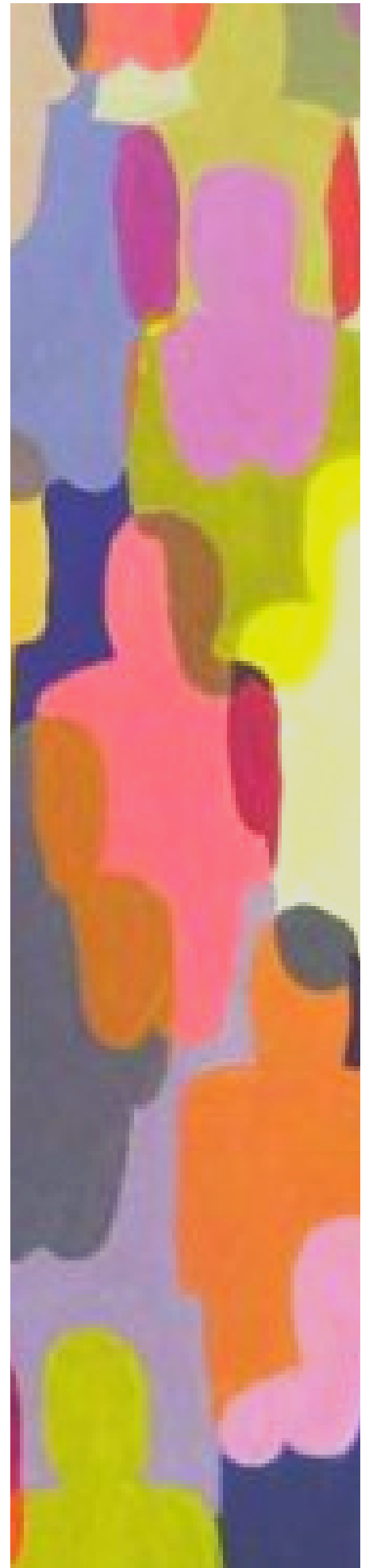
This is what he says in Philippians:

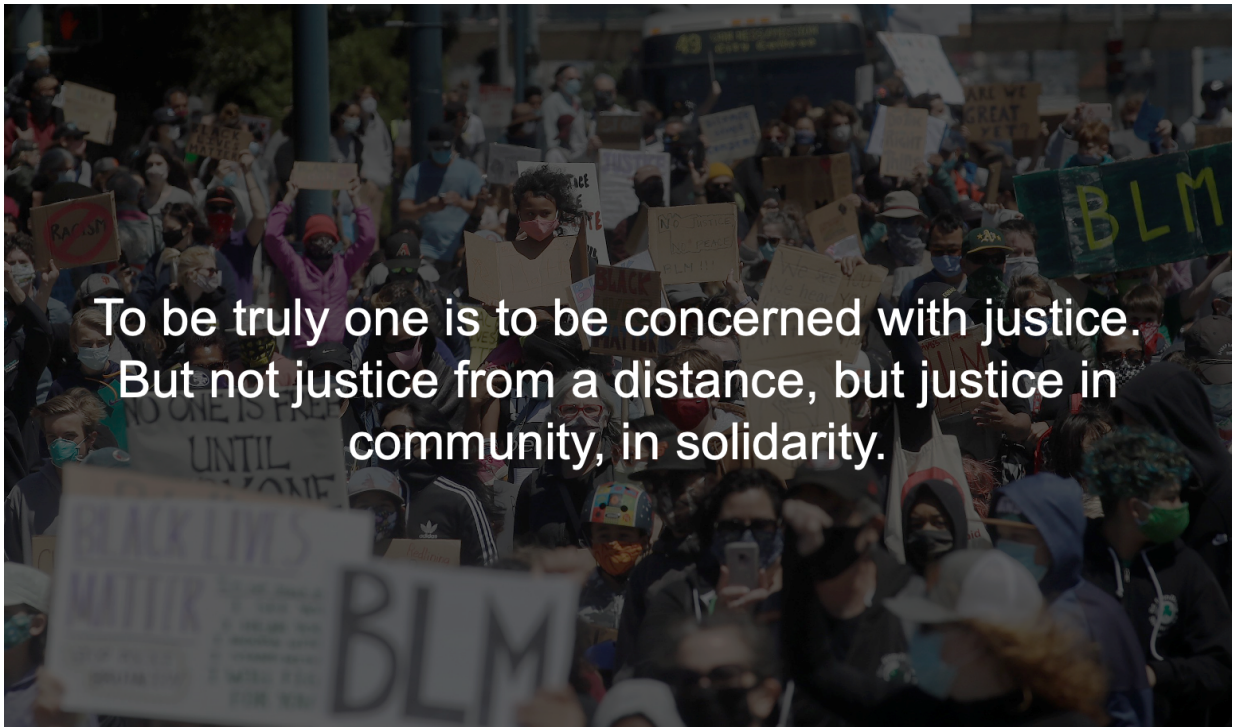
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.

(Philippians 2:5-8)

To clothe the weaker members in our society with greater honour, and to have the mind of Christ who emptied himself is to live a life in Christ: this is the shape that our lives are to take - individually and collectively.

We need to be spiritually rooted and be continually renewed by the Spirit.





To be truly one is to be concerned with justice.
But not justice from a distance, but justice in
community, in solidarity.

To be one means to be with others. This means we don't just feel bad for them from a distance. It requires being "with" those who suffer. And it doesn't just involve us saying "oh that's too bad, I hope things get better."

It means we move from **compassion to justice**. For **dignity**. For **love** manifested in **fair treatment**.

And it is not justice from a distance, justice in community and solidarity. To be one means that our quest for justice occurs with those who suffer, from a place of relationship.

And what is this place of relationship other than the church?

The whole world may not be able to be one, but in the church, as those who have found new life in Christ, we are to be one, especially with those are weaker in society and who suffer.

That is a radical calling for the life of the church and those who live in Christ.



**Called by grace through
revelation: what is the Spirit
revealing to us?**

What are the implications of these chapters for us?

How might we be one with our black brothers and sisters?
What attitude changes do we need? What changes in
thinking do we need? What actions do we need to take?

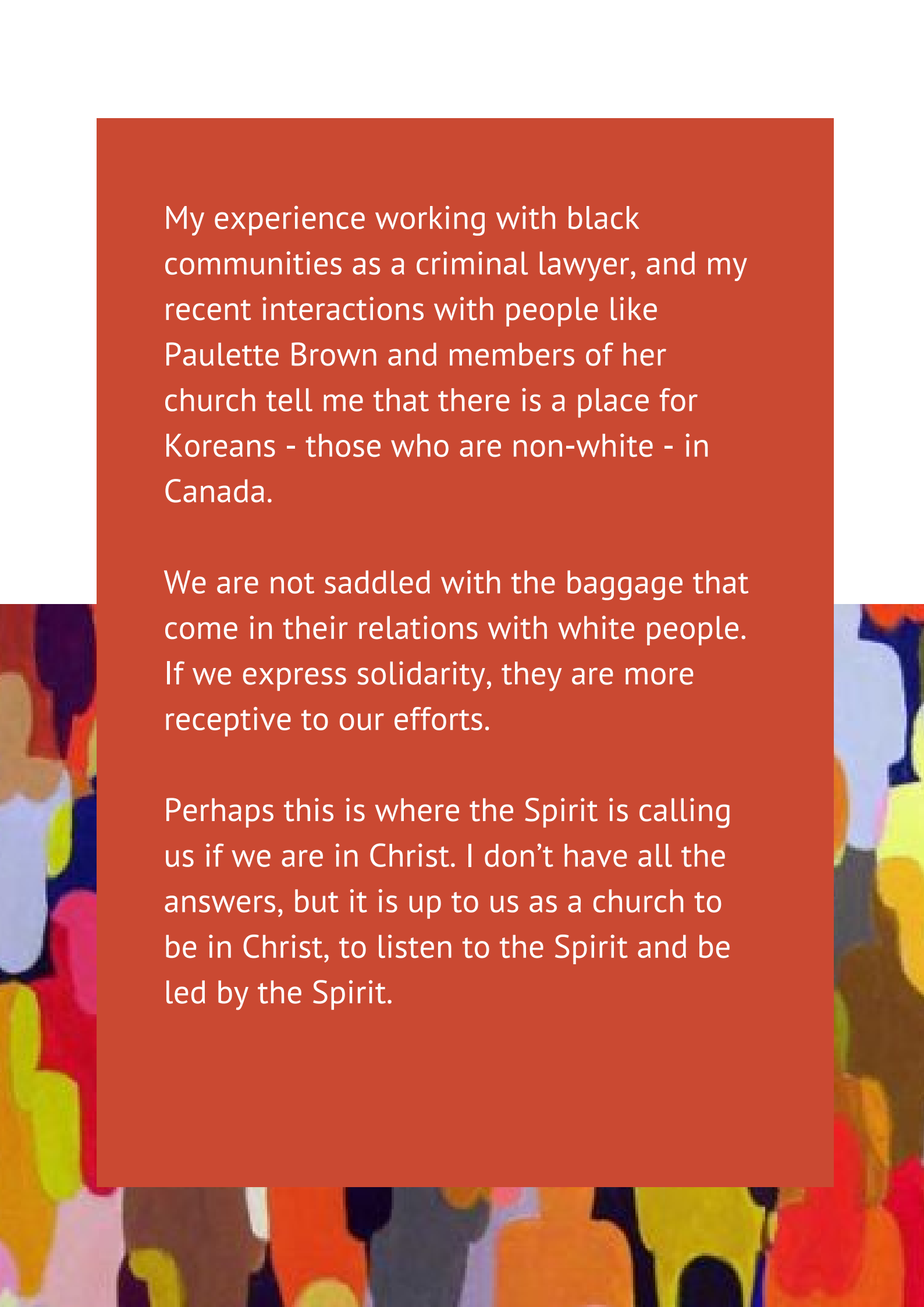


I've been thinking about the two different paths of Divine Narrative and Human History. Divine narrative is rooted in the promise, human history rooted in empirical realities.

The empirical realities of our history have been difficult. They surround us today. But will we simply be enslaved to our empirical realities? Or are we heirs of the promise, where God really made a way out of no way?

The Korean people on the whole, I would argue, have been enslaved to human history. Our fear continues to shape us today.

But if we place ourselves in the divine narrative, that of the promise, where is God leading us? Has not God brought us here to be in solidarity with those who suffer?



My experience working with black communities as a criminal lawyer, and my recent interactions with people like Paulette Brown and members of her church tell me that there is a place for Koreans - those who are non-white - in Canada.

We are not saddled with the baggage that come in their relations with white people. If we express solidarity, they are more receptive to our efforts.

Perhaps this is where the Spirit is calling us if we are in Christ. I don't have all the answers, but it is up to us as a church to be in Christ, to listen to the Spirit and be led by the Spirit.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss any of the concepts and ideas you found interesting.
2. What will it take for us to be a community in relationship and solidarity with our black brothers and sisters, and others who struggle? How can we truly be one with those on the margins who are currently distanced and separated from us?
3. Human History vs. Divine Promise: what is our calling as heirs of the promise? What vision is God placing in your heart for this new community?