

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY JUNE 30, 2019

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“What A Privilege to Carry, Everything to God in Prayer.”

Based on James 1:2-6

While at school last week, we played the “Privilege Game.” There were several categories on topics like gender, race, skin colour, wealth, nationality, physical ability, language; and a list of questions in each category. Each time we could answer the question with a ‘yes’, (meaning that life was pretty simple in that area) we collected a paper clip. At the end of the exercise, we were to count the number of paper clips in our pile, and consider how ‘privileged’ or not, our life was.

I couldn't help but notice that my pile of paper clips was significantly larger than many of my colleagues: international students with high levels of education in their own countries, often speaking several languages, but with limited English; many studying because of the generosity of grants and sponsoring churches, most with tenuous residency status as students. As I looked at my partner's small pile of paper clips, Juliette, the director of a

small seminary in Madagascar turned to me and said in her broken English, “Look how rich we are!”

I was startled. Rich? I didn't want to make an issue of it, but I was embarrassed at how big my pile of paper clips was compared to her. Rich? But then Juliette continued. “My country is very poor. Very few can study. Most struggle to

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~JAMES 1:2

eat. I am here, representing my seminary, representing my country. I study here, so that my school will become recognized in the world. I was sent here to do this. It is a privilege.” “When I go home,” she said, “I will be big woman in my village. I am the only one to study in America.”

“It is a privilege,” she said. “I am rich!”

She wasn't talking about money.

We forget that the life we live here in this great country of ours is a privilege. There were sacrifices, there are costs, and there will continue to be compromises made for that privilege. And with a national election just around the corner, and shortly after that, our neighbours to the south moving into a similar time, there will be much said, lobbied, twisted and turned, to maneuver this political party or that bureaucratic opinion into view on the evening news. It will be very easy to lose sight of the fact that there is a story behind our Canadian flag, and in a very strange time of international history, it is a privilege to be a Canadian.

- We have the privilege to express our opinion and not be imprisoned for it.
- We have the privilege to visit family and friends on the other side of the country and not be stopped as looking suspicious.
- We have the privilege of social services and food banks and charities when life

goes sideways and we need a helping hand. (FYI – in Madagascar there are no pensions, retirement plans or social assistance of any kind. If you don't work, regardless of age or ability, you don't eat. There are no retirement homes or long term care facilities.)

- We have the privilege to elect our government.
- We have the freedom to worship Christ in public on Sunday morning or afternoon or evening.
- We have the privilege to choose from wide variety of ways to worship.
- We live a privileged life here in Canada. Let's not forget it.

As Christians, we live another kind of privileged life. And I wonder if we don't forget about that as well, from time to time.

- Sometimes, church can feel like just something you do on a Sunday morning before brunch, with little thought behind it.
- Sometimes, if you are part of a committee, church can feel like a "Honey, Do List." (fix this light bulb, write this report, prepare this agenda)

- Sometimes, this whole 'discipleship' thing can feel more like a burden than a privilege. All the responsibility and pressure to act kindly, think of others, hold your tongue, be patient, pray continuously, ask "What would Jesus do?" when really you just want to bop someone in the nose!

"The weight of discipleship doesn't always feel like a privilege," you might say quietly to yourself. But the writer of James reminds us:

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds..." (v2)

This 'joy' the writer speaks of, is not necessarily the 'happy, happy, happy' kind of joy, but more a 'calm delight' or 'quietly content.' A privilege.

Step back from the troubles of your day, and your discontent with the world and consider how privileged we are to have God with us on this journey of life; One who directs and guides us, patiently holds us in our sorrow or anger, understands us when there are no words that come to our lips, and is endlessly patient with us as we veer off course, rebel against His wishes, or refuse to cooperate with His master plan. When all else fails, as the hymn says,

"What a privilege it is to carry, everything to God in prayer."

The promise of God's presence is the promise we live by, and have done so for thousands of years. It is a gift. But as sometimes happens with gifts, we forget about the grace and the thought behind it. We forget about the kindness, the intention, the delight. We get caught up with the problems of the world, our aching joints, our grievances. Sometimes we even convince ourselves that it is our right to have things, to demand things, the want more, more and more.

But sitting in that classroom last week reminded me sharply:

It is a privilege to live where I live.

It is a privilege to have, all that I have: more than some, less than others.

It is a privilege to learn and stretch my understanding of the world.

It is a privilege to serve and honour a God who serves and honours me.

Let us never forget how blessed we are in this country.

Let us never forget how blessed we are to be able to worship how we wish.

Let us never forget how blessed we are to have God, who blesses us with so many things.

It is a privilege.
Amen.

