

26 May 2024 – Healing & Reconciliation / Trinity Sunday

Welcome / Announcements

Healing and Reconciliation Sunday was designated by the 2006 General Assembly, recognizing the need for healing and relationship building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

As a church that ran 12 residential schools, we bear a collective responsibility to truth and healing. In the 1980s and 1990s, the truth about abuses children suffered at residential schools began to be heard. Over the next decades, more truth about the pain and harm inflicted at the schools have become part of our common memory, in large part because of the courage of Survivors and intergenerational Survivors who are standing against a legacy of colonial violence and racism, seeking to heal from their harmful and deadly impacts.

June 3, 2024 will mark 30 years since the church adopted its 1994 confession, which acknowledges the church's complicity in a deadly assimilation effort that targeted Indigenous children.

In its report to the 2023 General Assembly, the National Indigenous Ministries Council articulated the need for an apology that reflects the “now greater understanding of the profound harm these institutions [residential schools] caused, and continue to cause, to generations of Indigenous people.” As that apology is being prepared, members of the church are invited to engage in collective and group learning about the need for an apology, the legacy of residential schools and intergenerational trauma, the roots of anti-Indigenous racism, our responsibility and commitment to uphold the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and what is needed for truth, healing, and justice for Indigenous peoples. This includes in worship, which is central to our faith life and community.

Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation. We also acknowledge that the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – lived here before settlers of European descent claimed ownership of it and displaced those for whom this land was home. As we pursue our goals to dismantle racism and attend to growing diversity, we lament this injustice in our history and commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.

□ ***Dance with the Spirit***

156 (More Voices)

Call to Worship

Holy One you call us together to worship God as the people of God.

You call us by name and just as we are. You know each of our needs – our experiences – what rests in our minds and our hearts – and in your love you call us to worship God as the people of God.

We come together, our heads, our hearts, our hands and feet yearning to be remade and redirected to paths of justice, and in ways of love. Help us, Jesus, to walk in the paths of justice and love that you yourself have walked to worship God as the people of God.

Our Creator invites us to worship as beloved and loving people! Mold us, Holy Spirit to worship God as the people of God.

Gathering Prayer

God of Creation – everything you have made sings your praises. Let our voices join the song and proclaim your goodness, your grace, your justice, and your fulsome peace. With Jesus as our example, let our words become actions that reflect your will for the thriving of all people, all creation. May your Spirit of love flow abundantly into every corner of the world. **Amen**

□ *Holy Spirit, hear us (modified words / verses 1-4)* **381**

Prayer of Lament for children who did not return from residential schools.

Creator God of love and justice, Comforter of those who mourn, we turn to you acknowledging the actions of your church, our complicity in running residential schools and taking children from their families. We have asked forgiveness and committed to work for truth, healing and reconciliation. But we recognize that for some, that change came too late.

The names of more of the students who died and never made it home from residential schools are beginning to be known, but we know these lists are incomplete – that there will be more names and that some names may never be publicly known. But you know, loving and healing God, their names and their stories – their hearts and their families.

For those children whose names we do know, those we do not yet know, and for the intergenerational harm – the trauma still present today that grew from their absence – we apologize. We pray for healing for the siblings, family, and friends of those were taken from home but did not return, and for the intergenerational impacts the schools continue to cause today in families and communities.

For where there was joy and we took it – laughter and we stifled it – play and we turned it to tears – family and we broke it – dignity, and we crushed it. We repent and renew our commitment to walk a new path. We honour the children lost and hold the memory of their lives in our hearts.

Comforting God, we pray for healing in the communities and families of all who experienced residential schools, and strength for all who pursue healing, truth and reconciliation. **Amen**

Words of Hope

Creator God we confess our brokenness. We come before you with all that we are and all that we fail to be. With all we have done and all we have failed to do. God of mercy, in you we know we can find healing and wholeness. Thanks be to God.

□ *Open our eyes, Lord*

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Prayer for Understanding

Help us to listen well, O God. Speak to us and help us to hear. Amen

Scripture and Readings

Zechariah 8:16-17 (OT 883)

These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the Lord.

Micah 6:8 (OT 866)

God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Living Faith: 4.3.2

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. We pray as a church to be guided into truth knowing that such truth may disturb and judge us.

The 1994 Confession of The Presbyterian Church in Canada (from section 4)

We confess that The Presbyterian Church in Canada presumed to know better than Aboriginal peoples what was needed for life. ...In our cultural arrogance we have been blind to the ways in which our own understanding of the Gospel has been culturally conditioned, and because of our insensitivity to Aboriginal cultures, we have demanded more of the Aboriginal people than the Gospel requires, and have thus misrepresented Jesus Christ who loves all peoples with compassionate, suffering love that all may come to God through him.

Based on the PCC's 2019 Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery

The Doctrine of Discovery outlined a set of racist beliefs that European Christian people were superior to non-European Christian people. They were developed from a series of 15th century papal decrees that aided European monarchs with territorial expansion by providing theological and legal backing to invade and seize non-Christian

lands, enslave non-Christian people “in perpetuity” (forever) and to take control of their resources.

The racist belief in European Christian superiority underscored the process of colonization across the lands now called Canada and is seen in the establishment of laws, governments and societal norms that were based on European models—including within the church. While Canadian laws and government practices are changing over time, the long-term influence of racism and the beliefs that are articulated in the Doctrine of Discovery persist. This is painfully evident within the church through its complicity and participation in the Residential Schools system, the stated goal of which was the erasure of Indigenous identity and assimilation into “Canadian, Christian” society. While the church has formally repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action 46, and offered a confession for our role in running Residential Schools, it will take the efforts of every person in our church, and indeed across Canada, for the intergenerational harms of racism and genocide to be stopped and healed.

Listen to what the Spirit is saying to God’s people.

Message

In 2017 the Rev. Lloyd Bruce, United Church minister in Sackville NB shared this story of an experience he had taking part in a Blanket exercise with other Chaplains and Elders serving with the Correctional Service of Canada...

The floor of the prison gym is crisscrossed with colourful blankets. We move from blanket to blanket, greeting each other quietly, occasionally trading items – a cornhusk doll for a braid of sweet grass, a piece of leather for a dreamcatcher.

The blankets represent the northern part of Turtle Island, or North America, before the arrival of Europeans. The participants in this exercise are immersing themselves in the world, 500 years ago, of the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island, its original inhabitants.

Then, the world changes. A facilitator folds up corners of the blankets, making the land “smaller” as the participants learn about the Indian Act of 1876 that, among other changes, created reserves that were a tiny fraction of the original territories.

The people on the blankets explore the federal policy of enfranchisement that took away legal Indian status from First Nations people for a variety of reasons. This included pursuing university education, entering professions such as law or medicine, serving in the military, and, for women, marrying non-Indigenous men. Several individuals are taken away from their blankets, symbolizing the people alienated from their communities because of enfranchisement.

Over the next hour, we learn about the policies and actions affecting Indigenous Peoples. More individuals are asked to step away from their blankets. More blankets are folded; some are taken away entirely.

“You represent the Beothuk, the original inhabitants of what is now Newfoundland. Your people starved, died in violent encounters with settlers trying to take your lands, were hunted, or were taken captive for reward. Your people are now extinct. Please step off the blanket.”

At the end of the exercise, only three “survivors” are left, each one standing precariously on a tiny square of blanket. The remaining 20-odd participants are at the sidelines, having lost their lands, their identities, or their lives.

The blanket exercise was created, in 1997, by KAIROS, an ecumenical justice organization supported in part by The Presbyterian Church in Canada and PWS&D. Developed in response to the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, this exercise has been repeated in schools, churches, community centres, and workplaces across Canada. We held one at Knox some years ago. It is an educational tool that help us understand the truth of some parts of Canadian history that we are often ignorant of.

The scripture texts from Zechariah and Micah today are also here to educate – to remind us of the importance of truthfulness – honesty – justice, kindness and humility. The excerpt from Living Faith affirms that the Holy Spirit is all about truth – that the church, guided by the Holy Spirit into truth, is to live in the knowledge that truth may disturb and judge us which I would understand as a call to humility.

I am a self-confessed language nerd. I love words – the history of them – the correct usage of them – sometimes even inventing them! This week I learned something about the connection between the words “walking” and “learning” – a connection rooted in language. Etymology – the study of the origin and evolution of a word’s meaning over time – is fascinating to me so please bear with me for just a moment as I explain what I discovered about the history of the English word “learn”. Our verb “to learn” means to acquire knowledge. Moving backwards in language time, we reach the Old English “leornian”, meaning *‘to get knowledge, to be cultivated.’* Going further back to Proto-Germanic is the word “liznojan”, which has the base sense meaning *‘to follow or to find a track.’* Do you hear the connection between walking and learning? To learn is to walk – to learn is to follow a track – and as disciples, isn’t this exactly what Jesus is calling us to do? Follow and learn. Walk with him and learn – follow the one who is “the way”.

As we follow Jesus we learn and discover how to be the human created in God’s image what we are divinely meant to be. Jesus calls us always forward, not to the past, but forward. And as we go, we learn and discover new things which, of course, means that we need to confess a certain ignorance. We need to acknowledge that there are things we do not know – that we don’t have everything figured out – that we have much

to learn about ourselves, our history as Christians and Canadians. We have much to learn about God and what God desires for us as individuals and as a church. We need to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit that may disturb and judge us as we journey with Jesus in faith.

This is where humility comes in. Humility, from the Latin “humus”, meaning lowly, near the ground, soil – essentially, *being of the earth*, gravity. Humility is not a false modesty of putting ourselves down but being grounded, real, honest, truthful – about who we are and aren’t, sincere about what we’re passionate about and not, truthful about what we know and don’t know. Maybe that’s what humility is, simply telling the truth.

Richard Rohr writes in Falling Upwards: *“Frankly, a new humility is emerging in Christianity as we begin to recognize our many major mistakes in the past, especially our tragic treatment of indigenous people in almost all the nations that Christians colonized, along with our silence about and full complicity with slavery, destructive consumerism, apartheid, white privilege, the devastation of the planet, homophobia, classism, and the Holocaust. Our dualistic logic allowed us to justify almost anything the corporate ego desired. Now we are a little less arrogant about our ability to understand – much less to actually live this Christianity of ours. And our critics are not about to let us forget our past mistakes. The harsh judgements of humanity against the actual performance of Christianity are with us for the rest of history. All people need to do is Google, and they will know what really seems to have happened”*.

I think we thought we knew it all and were entitled to it all. That’s the basis of the Doctrine of Discovery and our past (and perhaps even persistently present) relationship with Indigenous people in Canada and the Church. We have been culturally arrogant rather than graciously humble – foolishly proud of our abounding knowledge instead of thoughtfully following the way of Christ that insists on truth, justice and kindness. The wonderful thing about embracing humility is that it facilitates change! We can walk with Jesus – we can learn, grow and change.

Maybe it is time to wrap ourselves in one of those blankets from the Blanket Exercise – to wrap ourselves in a blanket of humility – to own our history of oppression and subjugation. Perhaps we could examine our place of power and privilege as we work toward right relationship and acknowledge that the land – stream, mountain, lake, valley, desert, ocean and field upon which we live and move and have our being was taken from others who lived here before us. In humility we could accept that all creation is truly divine, and we are no more entitled to it than any other creatures that inhabit this world.

Think about the words we use: *human, humus, humility*. To be humble is to know what it means to be human – not a god, but a creature rooted to the soil. The rich life – abundant life – is found through the way of humility.

We must choose the way of humility. We can try other ways. We can ignore our dependence on the earth. We can think of ourselves as inherently more (or less) valuable than other people. We can hold on to our success so tightly that our knuckles crack. We can wall ourselves off from the swaying trees, protect ourselves from all vulnerability. We can cease to be amazed. We can turn off our sense of wonder.

We can, but Jesus warns us not to. The world is built for a different way of being. A way of being that puts our very lives in the context of something bigger – God’s truth, beauty, and goodness – God’s good and beautiful creation. We travel together best when the relationships that link us are woven with humility.

The cross is a sign of humility. And that’s where it all comes together. The story of Jesus, the story of the world and the story of ourselves.

This prayer is adapted from one published by Archbishop Chris Harper, the national Indigenous archbishop of the Anglican Church of Canada...

Creator God, we, the children of creation, lift our prayers of thanksgiving and praise. Humble our hearts and strengthen our spirits as we seek your face in the change of the world around us. Embolden us that we might invite and welcome you to guide and awaken us from the long slumber of our winter season of heart and mind. Open our eyes that we might see your light and peace, that we together, walking in truth and faith, might be drawn as one to new life and hope. May your word speak to our witness and ministry as we remember our beginning in you. This we pray in Christ, Amen

□ ***Oh for a world where everyone***

730

Offering and Prayer

We come sharing what we have with gratitude for the opportunity to give from the abundance with which we have been blessed.

□ ***Praise God from whom all blessings flow***

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All that we have comes from you, O God. May these gifts be used as we work for a more peaceful and just world. Amen

Pastoral Prayers / Womanist Lord’s Prayer

As we come together in prayer it is important to remember that prayer was used as a weapon for oppression and assimilation in residential schools. Let us be mindful that our prayers reflect this understanding of the church’s role in the harms of colonization. We seek to pray with humility and respect for the dignity and integrity of Indigenous culture, ways of knowing, spirituality, and self-determination.

God of truth, because we are imperfect, so too are the societies, communities and relationships we build. Selfishness and arrogance in our relationships do not reflect your love, and have too often hurt your creation and your beloved people.

We know that wounds inflicted because of false beliefs about the superiority of people of a particular race, class or gender do not reflect your love for all people, nor your commandment to love you and to love our neighbours. We acknowledge that even if we did not directly inflict these wounds, we have inherited wounded relationships and that diminishing, ignoring, or denying this continues our complicity in a cycle of harm.

We pray for those who are hurt and hurting because of false beliefs about the superiority of a particular race, class, or gender. God, let equity and justice bring healing.

We hold in our hearts...

...those who are sick or have loved ones that are struggling with physical or mental illness. Let them know they are not alone. Jesus, bring your comfort, justice, and peace.

...people who face violence in their relationships, in their home, office, community or country, and for those who have been displaced by war, unjust economic systems, the climate crisis, and ongoing impacts of colonization around the world. Spirit, bring your comfort, justice, and peace.

...people who living with housing insecurity – where home is inadequate for the needs of the people it must shelter, is unsafe, unaffordable, or inaccessible. Creator, ring your comfort, justice, and peace.

...people who are struggling with economic insecurity – where there are barriers to education or employment, unfairness in policies or practices, where there is transition, and change. Redeemer, bring your comfort, justice, and peace.

...people at the frontlines, that daily face the evidence of systemic racism and continue to strive for the safety and dignity of people and creation. Holy Fire, bring your comfort, justice, and peace.

God of transforming love, the wounds of racism continue to this day, imbedded in the fabric of our institutions and governments. Let your compassion and wisdom flow through all public policies and practices. Where power is hoarded, bring your justice. Where racism is resisted, bring your courage and strength to acknowledge and address it. We pray for decision makers and change makers and give thanks for all people who lift up the integrity and dignity of creation and protect human rights. And so we join our voices to pray this version of the Lord's Prayer together as Jesus taught...

Our Mother (or Father/Parent/Source) who is in heaven and within us, we call upon your names. Your wisdom come. Your will be done, in all the spaces in which you dwell. Give us each day sustenance and perseverance. Remind us of

our limits as we give grace to the limits of others. Separate us from the temptation of empire but deliver us into community. For you are the dwelling place within us, the empowerment around us, and the celebration among us, now and forever. Amen

□ *What does the Lord require of you*

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Blessing

As we go out today, may the Spirit rouse in each of us, minds prepared to be unsettled, hearts that yearn for justice, and bodies that work for peace. Guide and impassion us in love and justice, to walk lightly and humbly, seeking truth and reconciliation, healing and wholeness. May God's transforming love flow freely through each of us. Amen

□ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*