

Ending Racism & Colonialism

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NPMC - July 24, 2022

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NRSV); Ephesians 3:16-21 (First Nations Version)

Hymns: VT 209 - We Dream of a Turning, 428 – Praise with Joy the World's Creator; VT 59 – Father God, You are Holy; 705 – For the Healing of the Nations

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NRSV):

For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven:

² a time to be born and a time to die;

a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted;

³ a time to kill and a time to heal;

a time to break down and a time to build up;

⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn and a time to dance;

⁵ a time to throw away stones and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;

⁶ a time to seek and a time to lose;

a time to keep and a time to throw away;

⁷ a time to tear and a time to sew;

a time to keep silent and a time to speak;

⁸ a time to love and a time to hate;

a time for war and a time for peace.

Ephesians 3:16-20 (FNV):

This is my prayer for you: that from the great treasures of his beauty, Creator will gift you with the Spirit's mighty power and strengthen you in your inner being. In this way the Chosen One will make his home in your heart. I pray that as you trust in [Creator], your roots will go deep into the soil of [Creator's] great love, and that from these roots you will draw the strength and courage needed to walk this sacred path together with all [...] holy people. This path of love is higher than the stars, deeper than the great waters, wider than the sky. Yes, this great love comes from and reaches to all the directions.

I pray that you would feel how deep the Chosen One's great love is – a love that goes beyond our small and weak ways of thinking. This love fills us with the Great Spirit – the one who fills all things. I am praying to the Maker of Life who, by [a] great working in us, can do far more than what we ask for, more than our small minds can imagine.

It was about 8 years ago now that Kris and I went to visit some friends who were living in Ottawa at the time. Naturally, we went on a guided tour of the Parliament buildings, where we came across this stained glass window. If you read up on this window, it incorporates all kinds of symbolism. At the top is the year 2008, a reference to the year of the Canadian government's official apology to survivors of residential

schools. On the left side, it depicts shards of glass as symbols of lives “shattered,” and in the centre, children forced to attend residential schools. It also incorporates hopeful



symbols of healing and peace for First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people going into the future, such as drumming, dancing, beadwork, peace doves, and the nurturing of the next generation.¹

This coming week marks another historic occasion as Pope Francis, leader of the Roman Catholic church, visits Canada in person to apologize here on behalf of leaders of that institution who committed harms against children in the name of faith, or even in the name of God. He apologized already in April to the delegation of Indigenous, Inuit, and Metis leaders who went to the Vatican, saying, in part, “I also feel shame ...

sorrow and shame for the role that a number of Catholics, particularly those with educational responsibilities, have had in all these things that wounded you, and the abuses you suffered and the lack of respect shown for your identity, your culture and even your spiritual values,” he said. “For the deplorable conduct of these members of the Catholic Church, I ask for God's forgiveness and I want to say to you with all my heart, I am very sorry. And I join my brothers, the Canadian bishops, in asking your

¹ To read more, see:

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjo98Ot84X5AhVDAjQIHYYvAcMQFnoEAcQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca%2FDAM%2FDAM-CIRNAC-RCAANC%2FDAM-RECN%2FSTAGING%2Ftexte-text%2Fsgw_sqwdc_print_1354719743708_eng.pdf&usq=AOvVaw0UjEXAdujpxsePnCaU3kN

pardon.” These words, which were a long time coming, but they were still powerful for many in their acknowledgment that wrongs had been done in the name of the church.

With these words and his visit here to apologize, the pope is fulfilling one of the Calls to Action² put forth in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, that process held across Canada from 2008-15 that made space to listen to stories of abuses suffered and to make a path forward to address them. There are 94 Calls to Action in total, and four of them (calls 58-61) are addressed specifically to churches. Aside from the call for the pope to apologize, there are also calls for churches to educate themselves about colonialism and the role of the church; to educate clergy and leaders to respect Indigenous cultures and spirituality; and for those churches that were part of the settlement agreement to honour that commitment.³ Chair of the TRC, Senator Murray Sinclair, described the calls to action this way: “We have described for you a mountain. We have shown you the path to the top. We call upon you to do the climbing.”⁴

If, as our summer Scripture text says, there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven, we seem to be living in the time of apologies and efforts to recognize and address the painful history of Indigenous-settler relationships in this land. Throughout the TRC, we have been seeing that there is indeed “a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance,” and perhaps we can add: a time for truth and a time for reconciliation.

² <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/pope-francis-responds-indigenous-delegations-final-meeting-1.6404344?fbclid=IwAR16jYUhawvhLAHjqv1eAnHFRjqCDM4b0YiDoNsf6hf4o74PKUhsEtJE>

³ To read a summary of the TRC Calls to Action, see: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/truth-and-reconciliation-94-calls-to-action-1.3362258>

⁴ Quoted in: Anglican Church of Canada, “A First Look: The TRC 94 Calls to Action,” <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwj7n46HvYr5AhW9IzQIHQrvBicQFnoECAsQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.anglican.ca%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2FCall-to-action.pdf&usq=AOvVaw29fCI1HOX3X40Fqyae1QGd>

Within our summer worship series on Peaceful Endings, my sermon today is focused on the theme of ending racism and colonialism. When I initially raised this topic in our co-pastor meeting, Patrick laughed. And it's true – this is a very daunting and complex task. Speaking about “ending” these forms of violence that have plagued humanity for centuries can seem unrealistic. And yet for those of us who belong to the church, is this not part of our calling to be a community that breaks down walls between slave and free, Jew and Greek, male and female (as per Galatians 3)? Is this not part of Menno Simons' “true evangelical faith” that “cannot lie dormant” – words that sound very much like the Indigenous Idle No More movement that began here in Saskatchewan? Is this not part of creating a lasting, substantial peace that addresses inequalities that have been baked into our systems and institutions so that they're stacked against certain groups? In our context, working to address the wrongs of colonialism is THE main peace issue that we face. And it's one we know will take time. At the conclusion of the official TRC process, Commissioner Marie Wilson said, “We must be mindful that a process that will be as long and complicated as the reconciliation of seven generations of inequity will require stewardship, study and ongoing attention.”⁵

While we aren't under the illusion that we will neatly resolve this issue in our lifetimes, recognizing, with Wilson, that it will take as many generations to heal as it did to harm, I see so many signs of hope and so many steps forward that have been taken just in the past couple of decades, with the TRC, apologies, awareness-raising and relationship-building. Within our own Mennonite faith family, we have the good work of Leonard Doell here in Saskatchewan, who was recently honoured with the 2022 Global Citizen Lifetime Achievement Award from the Saskatchewan Council for International

⁵ Quoted in: Anglican Church of Canada, “A First Look: The TRC 94 Calls to Action.”

Cooperation. As Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan's Indigenous Neighbours coordinator for almost 40 years, his work in building bridges and relationships between the Young Chippewyan band and Lutheran and Mennonite settlers in the Laird area has been viewed with much respect by Mennonites and Indigenous peoples alike (and is documented in the film, *Reserve 107*). To take something as contentious as a land dispute and turn it into an opportunity to create relationships and work together toward reconciliation is really remarkable, and Doell himself recognizes that things have come a long way since the beginning of his 39 years with MCC.⁶ This is a step toward ending racism and colonialism.

Steve Heinrichs's work with Mennonite Church Canada likewise moved our nation-wide church in some really hopeful directions. When he began, his role was entitled "Indigenous Relations." He requested for the title to be changed to "Indigenous-Settler Relations," to reflect that it's not just the Mennonite church reaching out to Indigenous communities, but a mutual, give-and-take relationship – as well as one that's more equal. The resources he's written and edited have connected our denomination with leading voices in postcolonial theology and decolonizing work around the world, and he's built personal relationships with so many Indigenous leaders across Canada, including Sylvia McAdam, one of the co-founders of the Idle No More movement. Steve understood that the work of reconciliation requires us as a Mennonite church to not only be accountable among ourselves, but to be accountable to our Indigenous neighbours, and to take our cues from them. Though Steve no longer works for MC Canada (and the circumstances of his MC Canada role ending are not clear, and did not occur with

⁶ See http://www.otc.ca/reconciliations/details/indigenous_neighbours_program_part_of_reconciliation_path.html and <https://canadianmennonite.org/stories/leonard-doell-receives-lifetime-achievement-award>

consultation of Indigenous people or communities), my sincere hope is that we will be able to live up to his profound legacy in this regard.⁷ This shift to a more equal relationship is also a step toward ending racism and colonialism.

The revitalization of Indigenous languages, knowledges, and traditions is also a sign of hope. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, who is a Nishnaabeg (also known as Anishinaabe/Ojibwa) artist and scholar, highlights the question of land as we work toward reconciliation. While the apologies and TRC are important steps forward, they ring hollow when one considers that for Simpson, for instance, she cannot practice her Nishnaabeg way of life without access to the land: “Our sacred sites, our cemeteries, our hunting grounds, trap lines, fishing spots, ceremonial places, camping places, trails, medicine gathering spots, and wild rice beds are very difficult to access because they are on private land, in provincial parks, or under the control of municipalities and cities.” Without access to the land, they cannot continue their traditional way of life “as Nishnaabeg in our homeland.”⁸ Along those lines, there is a group here in Saskatchewan called the Treaty Land Sharing Network, “a grassroots group of settler farmers, ranchers, and other landholders willing to share their land with Indigenous land users. According to its brochure, the group is ‘committed to implementing the Treaty relationship, engaging in ongoing learning together as we practice being Treaty people, and establishing a different way forward for rural Saskatchewan.’” In practice, this means settler landowners and Indigenous folks gathering with a ceremony, collecting

⁷ For more on Steve’s role ending, see <https://canadianmennonite.org/braun-isr-2022> and <https://canadianmennonite.org/mcadam>

⁸ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. “Land and Reconciliation: Having the Right Conversations.” *Electric City Magazine* (5 March 2016). <http://www.electriccitymagazine.ca/2016/01/land-reconciliation/>

medicinal plants, and ending the time with a meal together.⁹ This, too, is a step toward ending racism and colonialism.

With these signs of the Spirit of reconciliation bringing us hope and courage, it is my prayer that we will see before us and before our children and their children a future that begins to heal the ugly wounds of racism and colonialism. Our prayer then echoes Paul's words from Ephesians 3: "I pray that as you trust in [Creator], your roots will go deep into the soil of [Creator's] great love, and that from these roots you will draw the strength and courage needed to walk this sacred path together with all [...] holy people. This path of love is higher than the stars, deeper than the great waters, wider than the sky. Yes, this great love comes from and reaches to all the directions." As we walk this path, we realize that God, our Creator, "working in us, can do far more than what we ask for or imagine." AMEN

⁹ Katie Doke Sawatsky, "Sharing Treaty Land," *Briarpatch Magazine*, July 5, 2021, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/sharing-treaty-land>