

Slide 4--8 (scripture readings)

Scripture Isaiah 35:4-7a

Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.'

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.

Mark 7:24-37

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.' So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.' And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'

Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, 9.5.21
Elaine Enns and Ched Myers (www.bcm-net.org)

Title: “Listening, Seeing, Healing Haunted Histories.”

Texts: Isaiah 35:4-7a; Mark 7:24-37

Elaine: Good morning church. We are happy and honored to be with you, and appreciate Patrick and Susanne’s generous invitation to preach. The last time we were in this pulpit was five years ago, at the conclusion of our Bartimaeus Institute at St. Andrew’s College, in which a hundred of us from across Canada gathered to wrestle with the TRC’s Calls to Action directed to the churches. The year before that, I spoke with you on Mother’s Day, honoring the women of this congregation that have held and shaped me, including those of you who participated in my doctoral research. So here we are again—after two *very* long years of not being able to visit family and friends due to the pandemic. We again want to thank you for the many ways you have supported our work, and to celebrate with you our new book, *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization*, published in February.

This congregation has been an incubator of our discipleship over many years. It was the backbone of my family’s life, where we celebrated baby dedications, baptisms, marriages and funerals—including that of my Uncle Frank Gerbrandt just a week ago. Ched was welcomed into the Mennonite faith here in 2007. I am a child of this church, which taught me about faith, scripture, justice, and community. These spaces, where Anabaptist discipleship is nurtured, resourced and challenged, provide a crucial check on our settler Mennonite drift into the kind of “middle class whiteness” that undermines our gospel values. We are grateful to remain in conversation with you about such important matters.

When in Saskatchewan we always take the opportunity to continue our own education regarding Indigenous Justice. It was good to be with Patrick, Irwin and Donna at the Stoney Knoll gathering a few weeks back, where Mennonite, Lutheran and Indigenous leaders discussed ongoing work toward land reparation for Young Chippewayans. This week we got a tour of Muskeg Lake Cree First Nation from former chief Harry and Germaine Lafond. We’ve been particularly mindful on this trip to SK of the issue centered by Susanne last Sunday: the excruciating disclosure of unmarked graves at many former Indian residential school sites, with more surely to come. It has been a Canadian summer of *revelation*—the N.T. Greek term *apocalypsis* literally means *uncovering*. We know that the work to heal broken relationships and haunted histories between Indigenous and settler peoples in this land is important to you at Nutana, a commitment we share deeply.

Ched: Today's gospel reading is a double healing by Jesus of two non-Jews, a sequence which plays a key role in Mark's overall narrative. The tale of the Syro-Phoenician woman is a particularly tricky one that deserves careful handling (I've offered detailed exegesis of this text in my commentaries). These two episodes represent the gospel writer's *midrash* on the prophet Isaiah's vision of a time when "the ears of the deaf will be unstopped."

We want to use these stories as a lens to look at the hard work of "re-schooling for decolonization" that Susanne referenced last week. In particular, let us paraphrase the Syro-Phoenician encounter, recontextualizing it for the contemporary challenges of decolonization in our respective places on either side of the 49th parallel. We're going to follow Mark's storyline precisely, but alter the characters using some poetic license in order to bring the scenario closer to home.

Let's reimagine Jesus here as a settler religious leader—let's call him Rev. Jesse—who is visiting the territory of culturally very different Indigenous neighbors. He is avoiding social contact, however, exercising his settler privilege of insularity from the "other." Suddenly, a very assertive and empowered woman manages to approach him with a petition for solidarity and compassion. Let us imagine *her* as an Indigenous elder who has heard that Rev. Jesse might be a settler leader who embraces Creator's vision of justice and healing. So she presses him to help make things right for her haunted child who, let us further imagine, has been brutalized by residential school experience.

Rev. Jesse's response is initially defensive—not untypical of us settlers when challenged. He rebuffs the woman sharply: "My concern is for the education and welfare of *my* community's children, whom God brought to this land, which through our hard work has prospered." Uncharacteristically, Rev. Jesse slips in a derogatory term, portraying this woman's people as "uncivilized animals." Ouch.

Undeterred, this *kookum*—who we may presume is a veteran of years of marginalizing and dehumanizing encounters—presses on, insisting quietly but firmly that her people deserve fundamental justice. She redefines the issue: it is not a zero sum game of winners and losers, but a matter of respectful and basic human equity. Moreover, she reframes his slur into an implied but telling query: *Do you treat your animals better than your neighbors?* Ouch again.

Her resilience, steadfastness and wisdom turn Rev. Jesse around. He stops, reconsiders, re-centers his better self, remembers his vocation as an emissary of good news, and actually *hears* her this time. He responds with the most remarkable commendation in the entire gospel tradition: "Because of *your* teaching, your daughter will be healed from this haunting." Rev. Jesse has been re-schooled by the suffering and strength of an Indigenous "other," who has reminded him that God's gift of healing and liberation is for *everyone*.

This episode illustrates how *only* truthful encounter with neighbor and self can lead to reconciliation. But do we settlers have ears to hear the hard truths that alone can set us free? And can we summon the courage to speak that truth in our own world of privilege? *That* is the subject of the healing story that follows in Mark's narrative, in which Jesus has yet another intimate encounter—which includes a non-Covid approved exchange of bodily fluid! The result: the man's "ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke *plainly*."

Elaine: How do we *hear* more deeply Indigenous teachings about colonization and survivance, and *speak* more *plainly* about what decolonization might mean to us as Mennonite settlers and re-settlers?

In our book we suggest that we begin by *facing* our haunted histories more honestly. The Prologue begins by considering one such haunting: a graffiti scrawled across a fence in a back alleyway of my old suburban neighborhood just a few blocks from here. It reads: "As long as the sun shines, grass grows and rivers flow." This venerable phrase from the Two Row Wampum of 1613 was reiterated in most subsequent agreements between European settlers and Indigenous Peoples in Canada, including Treaty 6. Cree elders use the term *kihci-asotamâtowin* to describe sacred promises made to one another in treaty. But everywhere our settler state broke such promises, while privileging settler development and prosperity, and that unresolved legacy *should* haunt us.

Last week Susanne praised Nutana's history as a community supportive of education, and I am a product of that commitment: a graduate of RJC, CMBC and Fresno's Mennonite Biblical Seminary. But Susanne *also* contrasted this with the dark legacy of *abusive education* in Indian Residential Schools. Is [Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, right that "Education got us into this mess and education will get us out of it"](#)? If so, then reschooling for decolonization needs to be at the center of the church's vocation. After all, we are wrestling with the oldest and deepest injustices on the North American continent, which inhabit every intersection of settler and Indigenous worlds, past and present.

Let me read just a couple of excerpts from our book, in which we invite settler Christians (and other people of faith) into a discipleship of decolonization and restorative solidarity. We believe that to heal the wounds of colonization that are inextricably woven into the fabric of our personal and political lives, we must go on both inward and outward journeys of decolonization. This involves exploring the places, peoples and spirits that have shaped—and misshaped—us.

We look at issues of Indigenous justice and settler "response-ability" through the lens of my family and our Mennonite communal narratives over the last hundred years, from Ukrainian steppes to Canadian prairies to my re-settlement in California chaparral. We examine my forebears' immigrant travails and trauma; settler unknowing and complicity; and our traditions of resilience and conscience.

And we invite readers to do the same. This volume is equal parts memoir, social-historical-theological analysis, and practical workbook, meant to be studied in a group. And we know that there is a long tradition of Nutana book groups, so... we want to gift a copy to the church library.

The prophet Martin Luther King Jr. said 60 years ago that our history needs to be “X-rayed in order to reveal the full extent of our disease”—kind of like the ground penetrating radar being used now at IRS sites. Nothing less will bring healing. Our approach looks particularly at settler historical silences, narratives of superiority, and moral injury, as well as legacies of resilience and conscience. We examine three interrelated kinds of Storylines:

1. *Landlines* (the “where”): our immigrant family histories, whether voluntary or forced, from countries of origin to Indigenous lands in North America, including our subsequent mobility and resettlements and their impacts;
2. *Bloodlines* (the “who”): our embodied story, what we have inherited biologically and psychically from our familial, ethnic, gender and cultural formation—and deformation—including the travails or advantages, traumas and impacts, of immigrant leaving and settling, and the costs of cultural loss and assimilation into white privilege;
3. *Songlines* (the “why”): traditions of faith and Spirit that animated convictions, resilience and redemptive practices among our ancestors, and which inspire and sustain us to work for justice and healing today.

How has untransacted trauma inhibited our ability to see the Indigenous inhabitants of the lands we settle? How have our unearned race and class privileges made us deaf to cries for justice? And how do we practice personal and political restorative solidarity today, speaking plainly in and to our communities? We believe that the work of re-schooling, leading to reparations and repatriation, can renew the witness of our churches, *and* help build a decolonized future.

Ched: From our Epilogue:

At our last in person Bartimaeus Institute in 2020, during which over 100 people delved deeply into Landlines, Bloodlines and Songlines work, as a benediction Elder Harry Lafond organized us into a Round Dance, a ritual that symbolizes friendship and solidarity. Around we went, arms linked, two-stepping sideways to drum and chant, smiling at each other across the circle. According to Cree Elder John Cuthand, the origin of the dance lies in a story about a daughter who was grieving her departed mother. While walking alone on the prairie she saw her mom standing on a hill, who taught her daughter this ceremony: “When this circle is made” she said, “we the ancestors will be dancing with you and we will be as one.” This tradition is linked to the northern lights. As Harry and Germaine’s

daughter Mika (who we had dinner with this week) put it poetically: “Sitting under a black sky sprinkled with stars / my eyes are called to the ones who have gone before / late at night they join hands / brilliant serpentine belt in the northern sky.”

If the Round Dance was originally for healing from grief, it is little wonder Elaine and I experienced it as medicine, in and for both of our watershed homes in California and Saskatchewan. There is so much to lament, so many hauntings from which we must heal, so much restorative solidarity to realize. But as we danced round and round that circle of Landlines, Bloodlines and Songlines, we felt the power of radical love, the warmth of a wind rising against the storm of settler colonialism. Let us dance together into a decolonized future, so that as the old Shakers put it, “by turning, turning we come round right.”

www.healinghauntedhistories.org