Sermon June 20.21 Can the soul of a nation be healed? Part 1 By Pastor Kit Greaves

Pray: Search me, O God, and know my heart;
    test me and know my anxious thoughts.
**24**See if there is any offensive way in me,
    and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.

Some of you may recall the song for Canada’s Centennial, “Ca-Na-Da. We love you”? Joy, pride, optimism in Canada coming of age: I felt it too, in my idealistic, growing up years: Expo ’67, the last year the Leafs won the Stanley Cup; safe, clean, Candu nuclear power-enough to last for generations; new Community Colleges and Universities spring up across Ontario; CRTC Can Con regulations permitting the rise of Canadian bands like Max Webster, April Wine, Bruce Cockburn, and in Quebec, Beau Dommage, Robert Charlebois, Gilles Vigneault; yes, Canada, a prosperous, bilingual, bicultural nation with a brand-new maple leaf flag. “It’s the 100th anniversary of Confederation. Everybody sing.”

And now, 215 unmarked graves of school children are unearthed at the Shushwap Nation in *Tk’emluips te Secwepemc* translated as, People of the Rivers; *Tk’emluips* sounds like Kamloops, B.C.

We’re singing a different tune. A lament.

Can the soul of a nation be healed?

A storm raged in the minds of the Philistine army fleeing in disarray after David killed their champion Goliath. A storm of doubt arose in the minds of the disciples after Jesus calmed the raging Sea. “Who then is this,” they asked themselves, “that even the wind and the sea obey him?” And in light of the discovery of the unmarked graves of little ones at the Indian Residential School in BC, we might ask ourselves as Canadians, “Who are we, to be party to such a catastrophe?” A storm in the soul of Canada. Can the soul of a nation be healed?

Tomorrow is National Indigenous People’s Day, June 21, 2021. I feel conflicted as a Canadian when normally I’m proud and as an Anglican Christian - torn, in how to mark the day: on the one hand, I give thanks for the leadership that the Anglican Church of Canada has shown in apologizing to our First Nations sisters and brothers nearly thirty years ago, seeking restitution and financial settlement with victims of physical and sexual abuse at Indian Residential Schools, acting with compassion and conviction toward making reconciliation happen across the country, healing centres, Indigenous language training, suicide prevention funding and counseling and in making structural changes to the Church in favour of Indigenous leadership, since Primate Michael Peer’s apology in 1993. We are addressing systemic racist attitudes with prayer and clergy re-training initiatives.

Here at Christ Church Oshawa, we have offered for several years through our Lunch and Learn programs, educational events around advocacy for indigenous communities and financial support for clean water initiatives in Pikangikum Ontario, supported by the Trent Durham Area Council and Bishop Riscylla. Our thanks to parishioner Cheryl Marek for her committee’s work. Cheryl has stepped down from that committee but we are grateful. We were saddened by the recent news of the death of the Rev Ginny Doctor. Rev Ginny, a Mohawk of the Turtle Clan, was a national advocate and educator for First Nations peoples and was our guest preacher here at Christ Church, three years ago. We’ve included in today’s email the link to her audio sermon from June 10, 2018.

Somehow, in this moment in the storm seems different.

It was good to hear our Federal and Provincial governments making announcements this week about waiving application fees for First Nations peoples reclaiming their Indigenous names and a promise of funding over a three-year span to identify, investigate and commemorate residential school burial sites in Ontario. These are four of the 94 Calls to Action from the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report that are taking place. Only 90 more to go and it won’t be simple. Ogichidaa Francis Kavanaugh, grand chief of the First Nations in Treaty 3 territory in northwestern Ontario and Manitoba, acknowledged the province's pledge, and said that recent news around residential schools in Canada has reopened old wounds for Indigenous people. "Truth be told,” he said, “it has impacted every First Nation member throughout this land we call Canada." Some might call what happened in residential schools "cultural genocide," Kavanaugh said  — but the reality is even more horrific. For us, it's genocide. That's what took place. They wanted to wipe us out," he said.

As an Anglican priest, I am no expert in the field of First Nations peoples and I have mixed feelings personally, knowing that members of my family, generations back, taught at an Indian Residential School in Sault Ste. Marie, ON. In researching my sermon, I telephoned the 1 800 Help line for survivors of IRS (the link is in the email), I am not a survivor of those schools but I was moved with a sense of wishing to make restitution for any harm that might have been caused at what is called the Shingwauk School; Shingwauk himself was a Anishnaabe Chief who signed a treaty in 1850 who sought understanding and equal respect among settlers and FN peoples. One of my ancestors taught sewing and piano at the Shingwauk school. I can imagine her praying with the children to provide comfort; perhaps she was instructed to also cut their hair, unaware that this simple act was a hugely symbolic act of robbing a little girl or boy of their Aboriginal identity. Another ancestor taught farming techniques, another led services in the school chapel. There’s no evidence of any abuse by my ancestors at the Shingwauk school. In fact, my great grandfather the Rev Alfred Greaves loved to sing as did his parishioners of St Mary’s Garden River, the Anglican Church on the Garden River Indian Reservation 16 km east of the Soo. Rev Greaves translated several hymns into Ojibway and as a gentle soul, loved his flock as best he could. What I see as a sign of deep respect for my forebears is, that several of the Greaves family are buried, with markers, at the Shingwauk Indian Residential School cemetery.

Perhaps you sense my conflict. Looking at their work at the School as non-Indigenous people, my ancestors, people of Christian faith, who were contributing to a system we now consider cruel, abusive, cultural genocide, were part of the prevailing view of Canadian society at the time that these schools were the right thing to do and were serving to the best of their ability in a sad situation over which they had little control. On praying over this sermon, I have the sense that the genuineness of their faith in Christ shone through, was caught by some and will continue to be part of how we will reconcile, how we heal and re-imagine this country.

We’ll conclude Part 1 of the sermon Can the soul of a nation be healed? with a portion of a song we’ve lost the melody to but still have lyrics for; it’s a lament for Nation, Psalm 44. It’s amazing how the ancient poetry of the Psalms fits the Gospel story and speak to us, 3000 yrs on:

Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep?
    Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.
**24**Why do you hide your face
    and forget our misery and oppression?

**25**We are brought down to the dust;
    our bodies cling to the ground.
**26**Rise up and help us;
    rescue us because of your unfailing love.

Enjoy National Indigenous Peoples Day tomorrow. Check out the book and video, 21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act by Bob Joseph, in the notes for today’s email. Check out the links in today’s email.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.