

Can the Soul of a Nation be Healed? Part 2 by Pastor Kit Greaves

Pray

Bishop Riscylla offered a powerful reminder of where we are dwelling now. She said in part...

I saw a cartoon-style image circulating last week on Instagram and Facebook. The top third of the frame had a simple drawing of a church with a sign beside it that said, "Love thy neighbour." The bottom two-thirds of the frame, beneath the surface of the ground, was filled with human skulls. Some depictions of the image have the skulls overlaid with words: 215 children – Kamloops, BC; 104 children – Brandon, Manitoba; 35 children – Lestock, Saskatchewan; 38 children – Regina, Saskatchewan; #392, Marieval, SK RS 751. Unquote

The storm of shock and grief that non-Indigenous Canadians are beginning to experience, as more and more evidence of unmarked graves of Indigenous children are revealed at former Indian Residential Schools, a storm that our Indigenous Peoples have been experiencing themselves for decades – this shock has parallels in the Bible. The disciples too felt they had little control over the elements, from the Gospel story last week, as their boat began filling with water, while the guest of honour, Jesus, slept in the back. The miracle Jesus performs once they wake him, is not just about danger and rescue. Behind the story the first readers of Mark's Gospel would probably have heard older echoes of Jonah sailing in the wrong direction and when a great storm rises and the sailors toss him overboard, the waters calm down. Or the story of creation when, God's new world emerged from the dark, primal sea. Jesus isn't a Jonah, running away from God's command. He is doing exactly what the living God wants as God's Kingdom comes.

The Gospel story today begins with a respected, easily recognized Jewish leader named Jairus asking Jesus to heal his 12-yr old daughter. Jairus may likely have been jealous of Jesus' popularity in small town Capernaum, but things are different when it's your own daughter who gets so sick. Jesus listens to Jairus' request and then does an amazing thing: he begins to follow the leader to the daughter's bedside. Before Jesus gets there, he is interrupted by a woman, who for the same 12 years, has suffered severe internal bleeding. These are amazing acts because Jesus is breaking the prevailing Jewish law of purity; in this meeting of two victims of unclean forces - since a chronic bleeding discharge and a dead body's discharge were considered unclean making a person impure and therefore cut off – Jesus is willing to go where others fear to go.

Suffering the storms of the early church, Mark's first readers probably knew better than most; they would have identified with the frightened men in the boat and with being described as unclean as the woman with internal bleeding. She feared in both asking for help, and so just touch his robe and fear of being discovered after she's received his help. Was it Jesus' power that rescued the woman or her own faith? The answer must be that faith, though itself powerless, is the channel through which Jesus' power can flow. Faith, however much fear and trembling may accompany it, is the first sign of that remaking, of renewal, of new life. That's Mark's invitation to us: Ok, pray to the Lord in our fear and anger and shock and grief and uncleanness as a country, for a person's soul or a community's soul or a nation's soul. And don't be surprised as Tom Wright puts it, when the storm subsides in the background and Jesus turns to you and says, "Don't be afraid. Just believe."

To the extent we begin to personally feel even a measure of the trauma and loss that our First Nation, Metis and Inuit citizens feel, there will be a sustained move to push our government to respond to the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 2015 fully and effectively, beyond a crisis response to a systemic reimagining of our country.

To the extent we realize there's power in suffering that is shared, in unbinding the wound for all to see, uncovering graves, naming our sin, naming our shame, giving it to God, allowing the power of his command over the wind and waves, over the broken lives and communities that need healing, over the unclean acts of a society and church, over the broken soul of this nation, then, what was meant for evil, can be turned to good, if we so choose.

You see, Jesus is there through it all. Even if the school officials didn't name the place where he or she died, God knew the place. Even if graves stones get removed and burial records are lost, God knows their name and God loves them to this very day. Reconciliation is a process; a confession, an apology, a repentance which is a turning from evil toward toward which is good, a re-establishing of right relations with people of all backgrounds.

Jesus is there in the storm to redeem and He is there in the calm, when the news cycle moves to some new disaster. Who is this that even the wind and waves, the body that bleeds for years or the body that appears dead, obey Him? Who is this? This is the Creator, the healer of nations, who died and rose again.

If Jesus can raise the dead, why didn't he prevent the genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada? The question misses the point. Jesus wasn't coming to be a one-man liberation movement, so he wasn't coming to be a one-man emergency medical centre. He was indeed starting a revolution and was indeed bringing God's healing power, but his aim went deeper; these things were a sign of the real revolution, the real healing, that God was to accomplish through his death and resurrection. Signposts are important, but they aren't the destination. Only if we see Jesus' movement then and now in all its dimensions, including the political, writes Tom Wright, will we understand that behind the intense, and intimate human dramas of past, present and future, there lies a larger, and darker theme to which Mark is repeatedly drawing our attention. Jesus is on his way to confronting evil at its very heart. He will meet Death itself and defeat it in a way as unexpected as the two healings. At that time, there will be no command to silence."

Can the soul of a nation be healed? I don't know. These things are complex. I do know that with God all things are possible. Can we imagine a day when, to paraphrase Dr Martin Luther King Jr, a nation's peoples may be judged not by the colour of their skin or the cadence of their speaking voice or their name in another tongue, but by the content of their character and the beauty of their spirit?

If this puts us in mind of the Calls to Action that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission published 6 years ago, good!

One application we might consider is reading a book by Bob Joseph called *21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act: Helping Canadians Make Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples a Reality*. We've put a link to the book *21 Things* and a video interview of the author in today's email.

Here at Christ Church we have been carrying out Calls to Action # 59, 60 about educating ourselves regarding the Church's role in the former residential schools. Our MAP process heard the desire for a possible youth mission trip to a First Nations community in Canada. As you may know our Children's Ministry Coordinator Michelle Alexander is from the Temiskaming First Nation in Quebec, where the community traditionally speak Algonquin. Michelle is also teaching her children the Ojibway language and from time to time shares stories on video as a Christian about her First Nations' heritage. You can hear a recent Children's talk posted on our website, ChristChurchOshawa.ca under Latest Sermons, June 6, 2021.

A further application about educating ourselves that you might consider as author Bob Joseph suggests in his book: Write your own personal pledge of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. We've included a sample Pledge that you can fill in, in today's email.

Mine reads: I, Pastor Kit Greaves, in the Spirit of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada, solemnly pledge: to learn more about Indigenous Peoples and issues.

To pray for and continue to look forward to positive change for the situation of Indigenous Peoples

To find ways to address the Indigenous-related myths and misconceptions with my fellow Canadians.

To not perpetuate stereotypes in my conversations or observations

To encourage others around me to keep reconciliation an ongoing effort.

To actively encourage ongoing support of National Indigenous Peoples Day every June 21st for myself, my family, my church, my community and my colleagues.

Signature: Pastor Kit, Date: June 27, 2021

St John's Anglican Church, Garden River Ontario, where my great grandfather served as Rector 1934-36 posted a video of their church which includes Chief Shingwauk's last words in Ojibwe and English which reads, "I go to be with Jesus, to whom I belong."

Part of an email I received from my mother this week, Mary Greaves, with permission:

Aunt Jean (nee Greaves, my great Aunt) and Uncle Noel Thomas were missionaries who toiled at the native mission church near Moosenee, Ont. where their four kids were born.

Uncle Noel's Dad was the Anglican Bishop of Brandon, Manitoba. The Thomas' burned themselves out there and came south, travelling by train to Sault Ste. Marie in the 1940s. Upon arriving at the Soo station they were met by Geoff Greaves and his family. Dad said they were the most forlorn looking bunch he had ever seen and the kids spoke Ojibwe. There Geoff assigned a kid for each child to take under their wing. (four each).

Bernice and Geoff built cabins for the new family to live in. In time they were able to work for the Indian Mission School, Shingwauk where Rev. Alfred was the rector at their Fauquier chapel as part of his duties at St. John's Garden River Anglican Church.

Aunt Jean Thomas was a sweet, quiet, loving person always putting others first. I wanted her to be Lawrence's godmother which she was.

Through Granny (Margaret Greaves) I met Maidie Hives and Ma Penny, two sweet old ladies who chose to help and to love the kids at the Shingwauk School. All of them, from Rev. Alfred Greaves and his family, the ladies and Dad's godfather Ernest Garber were there as missionaries, bringing the message of Jesus into their lonely lives. They served God and the people around them.

I have experienced myself the love the Garden River Ojibwe showed to the Greaves family whenever we visited St. John's Garden River reserve. When they learned we were Greaves, we were welcomed with open arms, an indication of lingering memories of their kindness to the native people there.

St. John's at Garden River. I think we took you there as a child.

You have absolutely nothing to be ashamed of but rather pride from your family's association with the people of the Shingwauk families.

I remember some of our recent chat with Archbishop Linda Nicholls our Primate, who perceptively and kindly understood the conflict and was conflicted herself. She brought a very good perspective to the issue after visiting the Shingwauk. The Greaves family loved the First Nations people and they in turn loved them and the message of hope they brought

It is our practice at Diocesan Council to have a moment at the beginning of each meeting to “Dwell in the Word”. A lay or clergy member offers a prayerful reflection to help guide our conversations and decision-making and to remind us of the context in which we live and move and have our being. Yesterday, Bishop Riscylla offered a powerful reminder to us of where we are dwelling now. I commend it to your reading. She said in part...

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Who do you say I am? Jesus asks his disciples one of the most enduring questions of Christian life, in terms of the faith of individuals and the character of denominations. And who do we say we are, in relation to our faith, our Church, and that image from social media? Who do I say I am when I reflect on the teaching from Micah 6.8: to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with my God?

In the Anglican Church of Canada, responding to the [TRC's 94 Calls to Action](#), we are in a process of change – of deepening maturity, of growing up and out – in which we are working intentionally to build partnerships and to support and facilitate self-determination in the Indigenous Anglican Church.

"Let us cross over to the other side," Jesus invites his disciples. A new time has arrived at our doorsteps, into which we must grow or decay: a time of reconciliation, of transformation, of questions and deep listening; a time to un-learn some of the things that have served us and made us rich at the expense of our souls, that have been established over many generations of colonial rule – for example, political and economic interests that have been defined as somehow naturally concurrent with the interests of God.

The gospels narrate a series of interactions that Jesus has with people – interactions that cross social, racial and gender borders, constantly reminding us that there is no center and margin, no “us and them” in the Jesus movement. That radical inclusion is the destination of Jesus’ ministry, the kin-dom, the beloved community. Interestingly, many of our texts, including in the Hebrew scriptures, narrate a series of outcast, often Gentile, boundary-crossing women who, unlike the disciples, do get it – the stories laud their faith.

Jesus is a border crosser! He meets people in their humanity, in their created-ness – created in the image of God. It is costly, this discipleship, living in the intersections of the boundaries and borders that both keep us and prevent us from being more fully human.

We are in a *kairos* time in which we can act with purpose and humble authenticity, to create a more just environment in our Church and in our land. Together we are all treaty people – Christian and non-Christian “other.” In Christ-like love and the beauty of community, we can walk the good road, learning to not be afraid to bring many cultures and traditions together.

The colonizers’ Jesus – white and culturally superior – is not the Gospel. Settler theology settled quickly into Christian exclusivism, to genocidal result. We have to change – to expand, to break boundaries like Jesus of Galilee did from the inside out – to become a worthy partner in these relationships. Our work is to focus on un-settling from the benefits of colonization. Our witness in the world is to speak our perspectives on justice, land return, shared revenue, the TRC’s 94 Calls to Action. May the settler Church be Idle No More – living up to the instructions of Creator: to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly.

I conclude with an example of Indigenous and Christian intersections: The Seven Sacred Teachings, how we understand the world and life together:

To cherish knowledge is to know Wisdom;

To know Love is to know peace;

To honour all of the Creation is to have Respect;

Bravery is to face the foe with integrity;

Honesty also means “righteousness”, be honest first with yourself – in word and action;

Humility is to know yourself as a sacred part of the Creation;

Truth is to know all of these things.