



Healing & Reconciliation

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

A selection of sermons for study and worship

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” 2 Corinthians 5: 17-20

In response to the great commandment “love thy neighbour,” The Presbyterian Church in Canada approved plans for a Healing and Reconciliation ministry. At the heart of the ministry is the belief that society will be transformed for the better when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people develop a new understanding of each other and build a new relationship founded on mutual respect and love of neighbour.

About the author:

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Lori Ransom wrote and delivered the sermons in this document. The scripture passages, church calendar date, and date and location of sermon delivery is recorded below. The information contained in the sermon was accurate at the time of delivery.

A note about sermon use:

Lori Ransom kindly provided a selection of her sermons for use by all Christians involved in healing and reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Permission is granted for congregations and individuals to print and/or reference the sermons for study or worship. Please credit the source. No part of this publication may be reproduced for purposes other than those indicated above, or sold at any time without written permission.

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Psalm 118
2 Cor. 5:14-21
Mark 11:1-11

CHRIST'S RECONCILING LOVE

PLEASE PRAY WITH ME:

O SPIRIT, GRANT THAT WE MAY NEVER SEEK SO MUCH TO BE CONSOLED,
AS TO CONSOLE, TO BE UNDERSTOOD, AS TO UNDERSTAND, TO BE LOVED,
AS TO LOVE WITH ALL OUR HEARTS AND MINDS AND SPIRITS.

AND MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH, AND THE MEDIATIONS OF ALL OF
OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE TO YOU, OH GOD, OUR STRENGTH, OUR
ROCK, AND OUR REDEEMER. AMEN.

GOOD MORNING. I AM DELIGHTED TO BE WITH YOU ON THIS FINE
SUNDAY MORNING HERE IN PICTOU, AND I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR
INVITING ME TO SHARE REFLECTIONS ON OUR CHURCH'S MINISTRY OF
HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN CANADA.

AS _____ TOLD YOU, I AM AN ABORIGINAL PERSON, MYSELF. I AM
A MEMBER OF THE ALGONQUINS OF PIKWAKANAGAN, OR GOLDEN LAKE,
WHICH IS LOCATED ABOUT 150 KILOMETRES NORTHWEST OF OTTAWA.
INDEED MY PEOPLE HAVE ASSERTED A HUGE LAND CLAIM OVER THE
OTTAWA VALLEY, INCLUDING OUR CAPITAL CITY. BUT HAVE NO FEAR,
MUCH AS SOME MIGHT LIKE IT, WE ALGONQUINS AREN'T ASKING TO

TAKE OTTAWA BACK, JUST FOR SOME APPROPRIATE COMPENSATION FOR GIVING IT UP TO THE POLITICIANS . . .

AS IS CUSTOMARY AMONG ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT I ACKNOWLEDGE WITH THANKS, OUR OPPORTUNITY TO WORSHIP HERE IN THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF MY COUSINS, THE MIK'MAQ, WHO HAVE LIVED IN THIS AREA FOR MANY CENTURIES.

IT IS GOOD TO BE BACK IN ATLANTIC CANADA, FOR WHICH I HAVE A SPECIAL FONDNESS, AS I SIMPLY ADORE THE OCEAN, AND JUST RELISH EVERY CHANCE I HAVE TO BE NEAR THE SEA. THE ATMOSPHERE IS VERY SPECIAL.

I'M ALSO A GREAT LOVER OF THEATRE AND THE ARTS. SO IT WAS A PARTICULAR DELIGHT FOR ME TO SEE SO MUCH PRESBYTERIAN TALENT ON DISPLAY LAST NIGHT AT "CRAZY FOR YOU." AND I CAN'T WAIT TO GO HOME AND TELL THE PRESBYTERY OF EAST TORONTO THAT THE PRESBYTERY OF PICTOU HAS THROWN DOWN THE MUSICAL THEATRE GAUNTLET.

THEN THEY BROUGHT THE COLT TO JESUS AND HE SAT ON IT. MANY PEOPLE SPREAD THEIR CLOAKS ON THE ROAD, AND OTHERS SPREAD LEAFY BRANCHES THAT THEY HAD CUT IN THE FIELDS.

THEN THOSE WHO WENT AHEAD AND THOSE WHO FOLLOWED WERE SHOUTING, ‘HOSANNA!

BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!

BLESSED IS THE COMING KINGDOM OF OUR ANCESTOR DAVID!

HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST HEAVEN!’” HOSANNA.

THOSE WHO WENT AHEAD, AND THOSE WHO FOLLOWED, SHOUTED HOSANNA.

IT IS SUCH A SHORT TIME ISN’T IT, BETWEEN PALM SUNDAY AND GOOD FRIDAY: BETWEEN THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY OF JESUS INTO JERUSALEM AND HIS DEATH AT GOLGOTHA.

BETWEEN THE HERO’S WELCOME, “BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD,” AND THE ANGRY DENUNCIATION, ‘CRUCIFY HIM, CRUCIFY HIM.’”

IN PUZZLING OVER THIS RAPID CHANGE OF MOOD IN THESE WELL KNOWN EVENTS OF HOLY WEEK, I WAS STRUCK BY MARK'S DESCRIPTION OF THE PALM SUNDAY WELCOME:

THEN THOSE WHO WENT AHEAD, AND THOSE WHO FOLLOWED, SHOUTED BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD: HOSANNA.

THOSE WHO WENT AHEAD, AND THOSE WHO FOLLOWED.

MARK SEEMS NOT ONLY TO BE DESCRIBING A PARADE SCENE WITH JESUS LITERALLY SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE IN FRONT OF AND BEHIND HIM.

I THINK HE'S ALSO MAKING A POINT ABOUT THOSE HE CAME TO SAVE.

I THINK MARK WANTS TO REMIND US THAT LONG BEFORE JESUS WAS BORN IN THAT STABLE, THOSE WHO WENT AHEAD OF HIM, THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, FOR CENTURIES BEFORE, HAD LOOKED FORWARD TO THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH.

THEY TOOK COURAGE IN THEIR FAITH THAT GOD WOULD FULFILL THE COVENANT WITH THEM AND SEND A REDEEMER.

AND MARK ALSO LOOKS FORWARD: TO OUR OWN TIME AND BEYOND, TO THE COUNTLESS GENERATIONS WHO WILL FOLLOW JESUS, CENTURIES AFTER CHRIST'S CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION, GENERATIONS WHO IN THEIR TURN WILL SHOUT HOSANNA AND CALL HIM BLESSED.

THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE, AND THOSE WHO WENT AFTER SHOUT HOSANNA.

WITH THESE WORDS, MARK IS REMINDING US OF OUR COMMUNION WITH ALL THOSE WHO WENT BEFORE US, WITH OUR ANCESTORS, AS WELL AS WITH ALL THOSE WHO WILL FOLLOW, OUR CHILDREN AND OUR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN.

WE ARE UNITED IN THE FAITH, IN OUR COMMON LOVE AND NEED FOR GOD'S SAVING GRACE, AND IN OUR COMMUNION WITH EACH OTHER.

LOOKED AT THIS WAY, WE CAN SEE THE PALM SUNDAY PARADE AS OUR COMMUNITY OF FAITH EXTENDING OVER TIME, NOT ONLY WITH THE PEOPLES OF OUR OWN DAY, THE NEIGHBOURS WE MEET ON THE STREETS WHERE WE LIVE, IN OUR TOWNS, OUR CITIES, OUR COUNTRY, OUR CONTINENT, BUT WITH ALL THE PEOPLE OF ALL TIME, WITH THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS THROUGHOUT TIME.

ALL PEOPLES THROUGHOUT TIME HAVE YEARNED FOR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, WITH OUR CREATOR, AND THEY HAVE YEARNED ALSO FOR HELP MAKING THINGS RIGHT WITH GOD, FOR GOD'S FORGIVENESS AND RENEWED BLESSING, IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR OWN SINS AND FAILURES. THEY HAVE YEARNED FOR RECONCILIATION.

WHEN ONE ATTENDS A CEREMONY OF WORSHIP TO THE CREATOR LED BY AN ABORIGINAL PERSON, ONE IS CONSTANTLY REMINDED OF OUR CONNECTION WITH THOSE WHO WENT BEFORE US, WITH THE ANCESTORS.

IN ALMOST EVERY PRAYER, ABORIGINAL PEOPLE EXPRESS A DESIRE FOR COMMUNION WITH THE ANCESTORS, FOR THEIR SUPPORT IN TIMES OF NEED.

TERMS LIKE GRANDFATHER AND GRANDMOTHER ARE USED HIGHLY SYMBOLICALLY TO DESCRIBE SACRED GIFTS FROM THE CREATOR.

IN MANY TRADITIONAL CULTURES IN NORTH AMERICA, ROCKS ARE GRANDFATHERS, ROCK-SOLID, DEPENDABLE, ANCIENT. THE MOON, IS GRANDMOTHER MOON, THE SOURCE OF LIFE, THE MOON CONTROLLING THE WATERS OF THE EARTH, INCLUDING THE LIFE-GIVING WATERS OF WOMEN'S BODIES.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE MAINTAIN GREAT REVERENCE FOR THE ANCESTORS,
THEY HOLD THEM SACRED.

AND CERTAINLY, LIKE US, THEY PRAY FERVENTLY FOR THE WELL-BEING
OF THEIR CHILDREN, AND GRANDCHILDREN.

THOSE WHO WENT BEFORE AND THOSE WHO CAME AFTER.

AT NOON ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11, 2008, TWELVE PEOPLE, DRESSED FOR
THE OCCASION, SAT DOWN TO LUNCH AT LE CAFE, THE ELEGANT
RESTAURANT AT THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE, WHICH IS SITUATED
ALONG THE BANKS OF THE RIDEAU CANAL, IN THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN
OTTAWA.

I WAS FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE AMONG THIS GROUP WHICH INCLUDED
SEVEN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS. ANN, JOSEPHINE, AUDREY AND
JUDY WENT TO BIRTLE, A SCHOOL RUN BY PRESBYTERIANS IN WESTERN
MANITOBA NEAR BRANDON. VIVIAN HAD GONE TO C.J., CECILIA JEFFREY,
NEAR KENORA, ONTARIO. JUDY'S RELATIVES, HARRY AND DOLORES, HAD
ATTENDED SCHOOLS RUN BY THE OBLATES.

I WONDER HOW THEY FELT THAT DAY. IT MUST HAVE BEEN STRANGE.
THEY FIVE WHO HAD ATTENDED BIRTLE AND C.J. WERE DINING AS THE

GUESTS OF THE CHURCH THAT HAD RUN THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS WHICH THEY HAD ATTENDED.

THE WOMEN WOULD ACCOMPANY OUR MODERATOR, CHEOL SOON PARK, TO PARLIAMENT HILL THREE HOURS LATER TO HEAR THE PRIME MINISTER APOLOGIZE TO THEM ON BEHALF OF ALL CANADIANS FOR HAVING SENT THEM TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL---WHICH, IN THE CASE OF ANN AND JOSEPHINE, HAD BEEN OVER 50 YEARS PREVIOUSLY.

WHO COULD HAVE IMAGINED SUCH A DAY?

VIVIAN, JUDY AND AUDREY ALL BROUGHT PICTURES WITH THEM TO SHOW THE MODERATOR, CHEOL SOON: PICTURES OF BROTHERS AND SISTERS, MOTHERS AND FATHERS, GRANDMOTHERS AND GRANDFATHERS. PICTURES OF FAMILY MEMBERS WHO ALSO HAD BEEN TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL.

THEY WANTED THOSE THAT HAD GONE BEFORE THEM TO BE REMEMBERED, TO BE PRESENT IN MEMORY, ALIVE IN SPIRIT WITH THEM ON THIS IMPORTANT DAY.

AND VIVIAN BROUGHT HER 21-YEAR OLD SON, TYLER. SHE WAS DETERMINED THAT TYLER BE PRESENT FOR THE HISTORIC EVENT, SO

THAT HE COULD TELL THE STORY TO HIS YOUNG FRIENDS, AND PERHAPS ONE DAY TO HIS OWN CHILDREN.

OUR FIRST NATION GUESTS HAD A KEEN SENSE ON THAT DAY OF THE IMPORTANCE OF REMEMBERING THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE, AND THOSE WHO WOULD FOLLOW THEM.

AND WHAT ABOUT OUR MODERATOR, CHEOL SOON PARK?

HE TOO MUST HAVE FELT STRANGE, AND A LITTLE IN AWE OF HOW GOD HAS WORKED IN HIS LIFE.

CHEOL SOON GREW UP IN KOREA, HALF WAY AROUND THE WORLD. AND HERE HE WAS, TWENTY YEARS AFTER EMIGRATING TO CANADA, IN A MOST HONOURED ROLE REPRESENTING A CHURCH WHOSE HISTORICAL ORIGINS ARE IN EUROPE. A CHURCH THAT ITSELF EMIGRATED TO CANADA, AND SOUGHT TO BRING THE WORD OF CHRIST TO THE FIRST NATIONS OF THIS LAND, YET DID SO IN WAYS THAT FAILED TO SHOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST TO THE FIRST PEOPLES.

ON ANOTHER OCCASION IN EDMONTON, EARLIER THIS YEAR, CHEOL SOON SPOKE VERY MOVINGLY OF HIS ANCESTORS IN KOREA, AND THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH JAPANESE CULTURAL IMPERIALISM. THE PARALLELS

BETWEEN THE KOREAN EXPERIENCE AND THE FIRST NATION EXPERIENCE ARE STRIKING: PREFERENTIAL TEACHING OF ANOTHER CULTURE'S LANGUAGE AND CUSTOMS, INSISTENCE ON KOREANS' ABANDONING TRADITIONAL WAYS, EVEN FOOD, AND PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE OF THOSE DEEMED TO BE FROM A LESSER RACE: KOREAN WOMEN FORCED INTO "COMFORTING" JAPANESE MEN.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF CHRIST'S CHURCH COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE EVIDENT THAN IN THAT GROUP AROUND OUR TABLE.

WE LAUGHED WHEN VIVIAN REMARKED THAT TYLER WOULD NEVER FEEL THE SAME WAY ABOUT HER COOKING AGAIN AFTER THE BEAUTIFUL MEAL WE SHARED TOGETHER AT THE ARTS CENTRE.

LATER ON PARLIAMENT HILL, WHILE WE WAITED FOR THE MODERATOR AND THE FIVE WOMEN TO LEAVE THE RECEPTION WHICH FOLLOWED THE APOLOGY CEREMONY, THE IPOD-WEARING TYLER LOOKED QUIZZICALLY AT MY 35-MM AUTOMATIC CAMERA.

"YES, MY CAMERA'S OLDER THAN YOU ARE," I TOLD HIM. HE CHUCKLED.

THE SEVENTY-SOMETHING YEAR-OLD ANN, PRACTICALLY BOUNDED DOWN THE STEPS TO SHOW US THE COPY OF THE APOLOGY WHICH THE

PRIME MINISTER HAD PERSONALLY SIGNED FOR HER. “HE’S SO YOUNG! HE HAS SUCH DEEP BLUE EYES!”

AT THEN ANN SAID, I’M GOING TO TAKE THIS HOME WITH ME TO SHOW THE PEOPLE OF MY COMMUNITY, IT WILL MAKE THE APOLOGY REAL TO THEM.

MAKING IT REAL.

IN THAT APOLOGY, OUR BLUE-EYED PRIME MINISTER SAID TO THE SURVIVORS OF INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS THAT “THE BURDEN OF THIS EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN ON YOUR SHOULDERS FOR FAR TOO LONG. “YOU HAVE BEEN WORKING ON RECOVERING FROM THIS EXPERIENCE FOR A VERY LONG TIME, AND IN A VERY REAL SENSE, WE ARE NOW JOINING YOU ON THIS JOURNEY.”

THIS PROMISE ECHOES A PROMISE MADE BY THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA IN OUR OWN APOLOGY, OUR CONFESSION OF 1994, IN WHICH WE ACKNOWLEDGED[THAT] THERE ARE THOSE [WITHIN THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY] WHOSE LIVES HAVE BEEN DEEPLY SCARRED BY THE EFFECTS OF THE MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE” CHURCH.

AND WE PROMISED TO WALK WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO FIND HEALING AND WHOLENESS TOGETHER AS ALL GOD'S PEOPLE.

THAT WE BEAR RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PAST, AND FOR WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO FUTURE GENERATIONS, BECAUSE WE ARE PART OF A LARGER COMMUNION OF FAITH, AND A COMMUNITY CALLED BY GOD TO FOLLOW CHRIST.

WHO DIED FOR US, SO THAT IN HIM WE MIGHT LIVE. CHRIST WHO, AS ST. PAUL TELLS US RECONCILED US TO GOD, AND IN DOING SO, HAS GIVEN US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION. TELLING US WE ARE CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS, AND IN HIM WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

THIS IS THE GOOD NEWS. WE TOO CAN RECONCILE WITH EACH OTHER, AS WE HAVE BEEN RECONCILED TO CHRIST.

BUT HOW DO WE MAKE THIS GOOD NEWS REAL?

IN TERMS OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, WE BELIEVE THERE IS NO BETTER TEACHER THAN CHRIST HIMSELF.

HE DARED TO INVITE THOSE WHO WERE IGNORED AND EXCLUDED BY OTHERS TO BE WITH HIM, TO TALK TO HIM, TO GET TO KNOW HIM, TO BREAK BREAD WITH HIM, TO SHARE WITH HIM. I THINK THAT'S HOW WE START.

WE GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER.

SO INVITE YOU HERE IN PICTOU TO THINK ABOUT HOW YOU WILL SHARE IN THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.

PERHAPS YOU MIGHT LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT FIRST NATIONS HISTORY, CULTURE, OR SPIRITUALITY. YOU MAY WISH TO INVITE AN ABORIGINAL SPIRITUAL LEADER, AN ELDER, AN ACADEMIC, AN ARTIST TO SPEAK TO YOU, OR PERHAPS A NATIVE BUSINESS OR COMMUNITY LEADER TO DISCUSS CURRENT ISSUES IN COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT.

PLAN A VISIT TO A NATIVE COMMUNITY. OR, IF MAKING DIRECT CONNECTIONS IS DIFFICULT, GATHER A GROUP TOGETHER TO VIEW A FILM BY ONE OF THE MANY WONDERFUL ABORIGINAL FILMMAKERS, OR READ AND DISCUSS A BOOK BY AN ABORIGINAL AUTHOR.

AND FOLLOW THE WORK OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION. THIS COMMISSION IS OUR COMMISSION, THE CHURCHES SIGNED THE AGREEMENT THAT GIVES A MANDATE TO THE COMMISSION TO HELP CANADIANS, ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, TO LEARN THE STORY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, AND THE ONGOING IMPACT OF THE SCHOOLS AND OUR COLONIAL HISTORY OF FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLE. AND ON NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

I FIND THAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ARE VERY KEEN TO FIND OUT, WHAT DO NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE MEAN BY “RECONCILIATION,” WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO US? ALL CANADIANS HAVE A ROLE IN ANSWERING THAT QUESTION.

WE HAVE MUCH TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER, ABOUT OUR ANCESTORS: NOT ONLY THOSE WHO WENT TO THE SCHOOLS, BUT THOSE WHO WORKED IN THEM, WHO TAUGHT THERE, WHO COOKED, WHO LOOKED AFTER THE PROPERTY, WHO FELT THEY WERE RESPONDING TO A CALL TO MISSION, AT A TIME NOT SO LONG AGO, BUT THAT FEELS EVER SO DISTANT TO OUR CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF HOW PEOPLE SHOULD TREAT EACH OTHER. WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THEM ABOUT HOW WE SEE MISSION AND MINISTRY TODAY? AND WHAT HAVE WE TO TEACH THOSE WHO WILL FOLLOW US IN THE FAITH?

LIKE THE CHILDREN WHO JOYFULLY BEGAN OUR SERVICE THIS MORNING, SHOWING US CLEARLY THAT WE TOO, AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST, ARE ALSO PART OF TODAY'S PALM SUNDAY PARADE, SHOUTING WITH ALL THOSE WHO HAVE GONE AHEAD, AND WITH ALL THOSE WHO WILL FOLLOW BEHIND US, HOSANNA, BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, HOSANNA TO THE HIGHEST HEAVEN!

AND LET THE SAME MIND BE IN US THAT WAS IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO, THOUGH, HE WAS IN THE FORM OF GOD, DID NOT REGARD EQUALITY WITH GOD AS SOMETHING TO BE EXPLOITED, BUT EMPTIED HIMSELF, . . . AND BECAME OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH—EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS.

THEFORE GOD HIGHLY EXALTED HIM . . . SO THAT AT THE NAME OF JESUS EVERY KNEE SHOULD BEND, IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH, . . . AND EVERY TONGUE SHOULD CONFESS THAT JESUS CHRIST IS LORD, TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER.

AMEN.

“For as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead (John 20:9)

Acts 5:27-32

- Disciples stand up to the authorities of the day to teach Jesus’ call to repentance and message of forgiveness from sin – this is the action of Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples

John 20:19-31

- Jesus greets the disciples, repeatedly, with the phrase, “Peace be with you.” Settle down. Don’t be afraid. I’m gone but I’m with you. There’s no need to hide from authorities. You can function in the world without me, physically present with you. I leave the Holy Spirit with you.

- Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into disciples: the transformation which his followers undergo in the power of God’s reconciling love achieved in Jesus’ death and resurrection
- Doubting Thomas – symbolic of our doubts in the reality of the Good News and our own transformation through Christ, and our consequent power to be ministers of reconciliation in the world . . .
- note movement from fear of authorities (behind closed doors in John 20, to willingness to speak truth to power in Acts 5)

Options for Point of Sermon:

Christ died to show us how to reconcile with others (we have to die to ourselves and live for others)

Christ left us with work to do: the work of reconciliation

GOD’S GIFT OF REPENTANCE

MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH, AND THE MEDITATIONS OF ALL OUR HEARTS, BE ACCEPTABLE IN THY SIGHT, OH GOD, OUR STRENGTH AND OUR REDEEMER, AMEN

AT FIRST BLUSH, IT MAY SEEM LIKE A STRANGE THING TO ARRIVE, AT CHURCH, ON THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER TO A SERMON ON

HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE. PERHAPS IT MAY EVEN FEEL A LITTLE ABRUPT, TOO SUDDEN, AFTER A FAMILIAR, BUT INTENSIVE PERIOD OF REFLECTION ON THE SEMINAL EVENTS OF OUR LORD JESUS' LIFE, DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

IN RECENT WEEKS WE'VE MOVED FROM THE GLADNESS OF THE TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION INTO JERUSALEM ON PALM SUNDAY, TO THE TRAUMA AND DEEP SORROW OF THE NEXT PROCESSION – TO THE CROSS – AND THEN TO THE PAINFUL MEMORY OF GOOD FRIDAY. AND FINALLY, THE ASTOUNDING, WONDERFUL MIRACLE OF THE RESURRECTION, WHICH WE CELEBRATED LAST SUNDAY.

AND NOW, A WEEK LATER, WE HAVE A SERMON ABOUT RELATIONS WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE?

HANG ON A MINUTE. ISN'T THIS A LITTLE ABRUPT? A LITTLE STRANGE? A SOMEWHAT DUBIOUS CHOICE? WE STILL HAVE 6 (CHECK) WEEKS TO GO BEFORE JESUS' ASCENSION, AND THEN THERE'S PENTECOST. DON'T WE HAVE TO REFLECT ON THE RESURRECTION FOR JUST A LITTLE WHILE LONGER?

OF COURSE WE DO.

SO LET'S BEGIN BY REFLECTING ON OUR GOSPEL READING THIS MORNING. HERE WE FIND THE DISCIPLES, IN THE DAYS FOLLOWING JESUS' CRUCIFIXION, GATHERED TOGETHER, HOLED UP EVEN, BEHIND LOCKED DOORS. THEY'RE BEWILDERED AND CONFUSED, WORRYING THAT AS JESUS' FOLLOWERS THEY MAY BE HEADED FOR TROUBLE. IT'S CLEAR THEY HAVE BEEN WONDERING WHAT JESUS' DEATH MEANS FOR THEM. THE WHOLE BUSINESS OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS MUST HAVE SEEMED VERY STRANGE AT THAT MOMENT. DUBIOUS: WERE THEY MAD TO HAVE DROPPED EVERYTHING AND FOLLOWED JESUS AROUND THE COUNTRY FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS?

UP UNTIL RECENTLY, THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH JESUS HAD BEEN MARVELLOUS. A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE. THEY HAD ENJOYED EACH AND EVERY DAY LIVING WITH JESUS, AS HIS CLOSEST FRIENDS, BONDING TOGETHER, GROWING IN FAITH AND LOVE, AND GAINING NEW INSIGHTS INTO THE HUMAN CONDITION AS THEY LISTENED TO HIS TEACHINGS. THEY WERE FEELING GREAT ABOUT HOW THINGS WERE GOING. THEY WERE ATTRACTING MORE FOLLOWERS, PREACHING TO CROWDS OF PEOPLE, BUILDING COMMUNITY. AND YET SUDDENLY HERE WE ARE: IT'S ALL COME CRASHING DOWN ON THEM. OR HAS IT?

JESUS APPEARS TO THEM. AND SAYS, "PEACE BE WITH YOU." AND AS THE DISCIPLES GET OVER THEIR INITIAL SHOCK, JESUS REPEATS AGAIN,

“PEACE BE WITH YOU.” IT’S AS IF HE’S SAYING, CALM DOWN! IT’S ALL RIGHT. DON’T BE SO WORRIED. AND WHY, BY THE WAY, HAVE YOU BOLTED THE DOORS AND SHUT THE WORLD OUT? “PEACE BE WITH YOU.” DON’T BE AFRAID. THERE’S A POINT TO WHAT’S JUST HAPPENED.

STILL THE DISCIPLES ARE IN SHOCK, IN FACT, ONE WOULD IMAGINE, THEY’RE NOW IN EVEN GREATER SHOCK HAVING JUST ENCOUNTERED THEIR FRIEND, JESUS, RAISED FROM THE DEAD. THEY MEET UP WITH THOMAS AND TELL HIM THAT THEY’VE SEEN JESUS, BUT THEY’RE NOT VERY CONVINCING ON THE SUBJECT OF JESUS’ RESURRECTION YET. THOMAS CERTAINLY ISN’T PREPARED TO BELIEVE THEIR ACCOUNT. PERHAPS BECAUSE THE DISCIPLES ARE STILL BEWILDERED ABOUT IT ALL THEMSELVES. THE TEXT TELLS US THAT JESUS DID MANY SIGNS IN THE PRESENCE OF HIS DISCIPLES. I BET THEY NEEDED MANY SIGNS – A LOT OF INTENSIVE THERAPY — FROM JESUS, IN HELPING THEM TAKE IT ALL IN.

BECAUSE AS MUCH AS WE FOCUS IN THE WEEK AFTER THE RESURRECTION ON THOMAS, AS IF HE’S THE EPITOME OF STUBBORNNNESS, THE MAN WHO BECAME THE “DOUBTING THOMAS” OF OUR EVERYDAY DISCOURSE, I SOMEHOW, DOUBT THAT ALL OF THE OTHER DISCIPLES WERE IMMEDIATELY AND COMPLETELY AT EASE WITH WHAT HAD JUST HAPPENED. AND WHAT IT ALL MEANS.

WHEN JESUS ARRIVES, AGAIN, A FULL WEEK AFTER THE RESURRECTION TO GREET THOMAS, WE FIND THAT ALL OF THE DISCIPLES ARE STILL HOLED UP, BEHIND DOORS WHICH ARE CERTAINLY CLOSED, AND PROBABLY STILL LOCKED, AS THEY ARE IN AT LEAST SOME MODERN TRANSLATIONS OF JOHN'S GOSPEL.

SO JESUS AGAIN GOES ABOUT REASSURING THEM. "PEACE BE WITH YOU." "PEACE BE WITH YOU. AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, SO I SEND YOU. RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT."

JESUS REASSURES HIS FOLLOWERS THAT THERE IS A POINT TO HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION. JESUS' JOB ON EARTH IS DONE, BUT THE DISCIPLES NOW HAVE A JOB TO DO. IN FACT THEY HAVE A LOT OF WORK TO DO, WITH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WHICH THEY NOW RECEIVE FROM JESUS.

AND AS WE SEE, MOVING TO OUR TEXT FROM ACTS THIS MORNING, THE DISCIPLES EVENTUALLY DO TAKE THE MESSAGE TO HEART, WITH THE HELP OF THAT HOLY SPIRIT. HERE, IN FACT, WE SEE THEY HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED BY THAT EXPERIENCE. THEY ARE NO LONGER AFRAID. NO LONGER BEHIND CLOSED DOORS, NO LONGER WORRIED ABOUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THEM. HERE, IN ACTS, WE FIND THEM SO UNAFRAID OF WHAT THE WORLD THINKS OF THEM, AS TO BE STANDING UP TO THE

AUTHORITIES WHO HAVE ORDERED THEM NOT TO SPEAK ABOUT JESUS IN THE TEMPLE. THEY'VE DEFIED THAT ORDER, AND ARE TALKING TO THE PEOPLE ABOUT JESUS, AND ABOUT WHAT JESUS' LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION MEAN.

BUT WHAT EXACTLY ARE THEY SPEAKING ABOUT? WHAT IS THIS JOB JESUS HAS LEFT THEM TO DO? THE BIBLE TALKS ABOUT NOTIONS VERY FAMILIAR TO ALL OF US: JESUS' SACRIFICE WAS ONE OF ATONEMENT, VICARIOUS SUFFERING ON OUR BEHALF. HE DIED TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS. WE READ THAT THE DISCIPLES PROCLAIMED TO THE HIGH COUNCIL THAT JESUS DIED TO "GIVE REPENTANCE TO ISRAEL."

HANG ON, RUN THAT BY ME AGAIN: "JESUS DIED TO GIVE REPENTANCE TO ISRAEL." GIVE REPENTANCE. THIS "GIVING OF REPENTANCE" IS PRETTY UGLY SEMANTICS, ISN'T IT? THE DISCIPLES ARE OUT, IN THEIR NEW FOUND CONFIDENCE, PREACHING THAT GOD, THROUGH JESUS' LIFE, DEATH AND RESURRECTION, HAS GIVEN REPENTANCE TO HIS PEOPLE. GOODNESS GRACIOUS. HAVE YOU GOT THAT? GOD, THROUGH JESUS, HAS GIVEN REPENTANCE TO HIS PEOPLE.

LET'S BREAK THAT DOWN. IT'S A GIFT, RIGHT? SOMETHING GIVEN IS CLEARLY A GIFT. SO REPENTANCE IS A GIFT FROM GOD.

WHAT A TRULY RADICAL GIFT. WHAT WOULD OUR REACTION BE IF ON OUR NEXT BIRTHDAY, A SPOUSE, OR A BROTHER OR SISTER, OR PERHAPS A CHILD, GAVE TO ONE OF US THE GIFT OF REPENTANCE?

PUTTING ASIDE OUR INITIAL THOUGHT, THAT SUCH A GIFT, COMING FROM ONE OF OUR RELATIVES, MIGHT SEEM A LITTLE PRESUMPTIOUS, HOW DO WE REACT TO THE THOUGHT THAT GOD HAS GIVEN US THE GIFT OF REPENTANCE? AND THAT IT IS A REAL GIFT. GIVEN TO US BY A LOVING PARENT, AS A GIFT FROM THE HEART, GIVEN WITH LOVE.

WHAT A RADICAL GIFT. LET'S THINK ABOUT THAT GIFT ANOTHER WAY. HAVE YOU EVER STOPPED TO CONSIDER HOW REMARKABLE IT IS THAT WE ARE A SPECIES CAPABLE OF REPENTING FOR WHAT WE HAVE DONE WRONG? OF SAYING, WE'RE SORRY. WE NEED TO MAKE A FRESH START HERE. WE HAVE DONE SOMETHING HARMFUL, HURTFUL, DISHONEST, UNFAIR, SELFISH. AND WE TRULY REGRET WHAT WE DID. WE REPENT OF OUR ACTIONS. AND WE WANT TO MAKE UP FOR THEM, TO ATONE FOR OUR SINS.

THE HUMAN ABILITY TO REPENT COULD ONLY BE A GIFT FROM A LIVING AND LOVING GOD. IF IT WERE TRULY A DARWINIAN DOG-EAT-DOG WORLD, WHAT NEED WOULD WE HAVE OF THE CAPACITY, THE ABILITY, TO REPENT? IF IT WERE ALL ABOUT INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS OR THE

SUCCESS OF OUR PARTICULAR GROUP, OVER OTHERS, NO MATTER WHO GOT HURT, WHO GOT USED, OR WHO GOT ABUSED, THERE WOULD BE NO NEED FOR SUCH A GIFT AS REPENTANCE. THE CAPACITY TO EXPRESS REGRET TO ANOTHER HUMAN BEING WOULD NOT BE A TRAIT USEFUL FOR HUMAN SURVIVAL. IT WOULD BE SELECTED OUT OF US. WE WOULD EVOLVE WITHOUT THE CAPACITY TO REPENT.

WHY WOULD THE FITTEST NEED TO STOP, AND NOT ONLY SAY THEY ARE SORRY TO THOSE WHO THEY, OR THEIR PEOPLE, HAVE USED, IN ORDER TO ACQUIRE THE BEST FOR THEMSELVES ALONE, BUT WHY WOULD THOSE WHO HAVE BENEFITTED FROM WRONGS COMMITTED AGAINST OTHERS NEED TO TRULY REPENT, AND REACH OUT, AND GIVE THOSE THEY'VE WRONGED A HELPING HAND? TO MAKE UP FOR THE WRONG THEY OR THEIR PEOPLE HAVE DONE TO OTHERS?

THIS NOTION THAT REPENTANCE SHOULD BE SEEN AS A GIFT, SOMETHING TO VALUED AND CELEBRATED AS A GIFT, COULD ONLY COME FROM THE GOD WHO HAS BEEN REVEALED TO US THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

SO, HOW SIGNIFICANT IS IT THAT ON THE SUNDAY AFTER EASTER OUR LECTIONARY READINGS REMIND US THAT JESUS DIED TO GIVE US THE GIFT OF REPENTANCE?

IN 1994, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA MADE ITS CONFESSION TO THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF CANADA. IN OUR CONFESSION WE STATED THAT “WE REGRET THERE ARE THOSE [WITHIN THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY] WHOSE LIVES HAVE BEEN DEEPLY SCARRED BY THE EFFECTS OF THE MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE” CHURCH. WE PRAYED THAT “GOD WILL GUIDE US IN COMPASSIONATE WAYS TOWARDS HELPING [ABORIGINAL PEOPLE] TO HEAL.”

THE CONFESSION AND PRAYER, TOGETHER, FORM THE VITAL COMPONENTS OF REPENTANCE. SAYING SORRY, EXPRESSING REGRET IS PART OF REPENTANCE, BUT IT’S ONLY ONE PART. THE OTHER PART OF REPENTANCE INVOLVES HEALING THE WRONGS BETWEEN PEOPLE THAT LED TO THE EXPRESSION OF SORROW AND REGRET. THE OTHER PART OF REPENTANCE IS RECONCILIATION.

I RECENTLY HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF SPENDING TIME WITH A GROUP OF SEMINARY STUDENTS IN THE PRESBYTERIAN DENOMINATIONAL FORMATION CLASS, RUN BY ONE OF OUR FORMER MODERATORS, GLEN DAVIS, AT THE VANCOUVER SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY.

IN DISCUSSING THE 1994 CONFESSION, AND THE SUBJECT OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION, ONE OF THE STUDENTS REFLECTED ON WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE OUT OUR CONFESSION WITH A SIMPLE ILLUSTRATION.

HE SAID, IF WE'RE NOT CAREFUL, ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WILL HEAR OUR CONFESSION AND NOT BELIEVE US. WE'LL COME ACROSS LIKE THE CLASS BULLY. WHO AFTER PICKING ON ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE CLASS, IS CAUGHT BY HER TEACHER, AND FORCED TO TURN TO THE CHILD SHE'S BEEN TORMENTING TO SAY, "I'M SORRY." THE BULLY SMILES SWEETLY AT THE TEACHER, AND THEN GOES OFF TO BE WITH HER OTHER FRIENDS, CONTINUING TO IGNORE THE CHILD SHE HAS BULLIED. THE BULLY IS NOT REALLY SORRY. SHE SAID SHE WAS SORRY, BECAUSE IT WAS THE THING TO DO. BUT SHE HAS NOT REPENTED OF HER ACTION, IN THE LEAST. SHE'S ONLY GIVEN LIP SERVICE TO THE CONCEPT OF REPENTANCE. AND WHAT'S MORE, THE CHILD SHE HAS BULLIED, KNOWS IT. THE CHILD KNOWS THE BULLY IS NOT REALLY SORRY FOR WHAT SHE DID. THE BULLY JUST DIDN'T WANT TO GET IN TROUBLE WITH THAT HIGHER POWER, THE TEACHER.

TRUE REPENTANCE INVOLVES NOT ONLY SAYING SORRY, BUT CHANGING BEHAVIOUR, LEARNING FROM MISTAKES OF THE PAST AND TAKING STEPS TO RECONCILE WITH THE INDIVIDUAL, THE FAMILY, THE COMMUNITY, THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM ONESELF, ONE'S FAMILY, ONE'S COMMUNITY, OR ONE'S PEOPLE HAS NOT BEEN IN RIGHT RELATIONSHIP.

PAUL WRITES IN CORINTHIANS ABOUT REPENTANCE USING THE WORD RECONCILIATION. HE SAID, “GOD HAS RECONCILED HIMSELF TO US THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, AND HAS GIVEN US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION,” THE GIFT, ONE MIGHT SAY, OF BEING ABLE TO RECONCILE WITH OTHERS, AS GOD HIMSELF HAS RECONCILED WITH US, FORGIVING US OUR SINS, AND ASKING US TO ACCEPT THE GIFT OF REPENTANCE.

PERHAPS THE VERY FAMILIAR STORY OF DOUBTING THOMAS, AND THE FRIGHTENED DISCIPLES, SYMBOLIZES OUR OWN DOUBTS AND FEARS ABOUT OUR ABILITY TO ACCEPT THE GIFT OF REPENTANCE, AND ALL IT MEANS FOR US.

CAN WE RECONCILE WITH THOSE WHO ARE DIFFERENT FROM US? WITH THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, WHO, PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH OFTEN TELL ME, THEY DON’T REALLY KNOW.

CAN WE SPEAK WITH CONFIDENCE ON THEIR BEHALF, TO THE AUTHORITIES OF OUR DAY, WHEN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE CRY OUT FOR US TO SPEAK UP FOR THEM AND THEIR NEEDS?

HAVING TRULY CONFESSED AND ASKED FORGIVENESS FOR THE MISTAKES WE’VE MADE IN THE PAST, MANY PEOPLE, HONEST, GOOD

HEARTED, TRULY REPENTANT PEOPLE, ARE AFRAID OF MAKING MORE MISTAKES, OF GETTING IT WRONG, IN TRYING TO BUILD A NEW RELATIONSHIP. THEY WORRY ABOUT SOMEHOW COMPOUNDING OUR PAST COLLECTIVE ERRORS, AND THEREBY MAKING THINGS WORSE BETWEEN ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

IN THE FACE OF SUCH DOUBTS, MIGHT CHRIST NOT SAY TO US, “PEACE BE WITH YOU”?

PEACE BE WITH YOU. DO NOT BE AFRAID. I HAVE SENT MY SPIRIT TO HELP YOU.

WHEN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE PRAY, ESPECIALLY IN A SETTING WHERE THEY MAY BE MEETING WITH OTHERS WITH WHOM THEY MAY NOT AGREE, WHERE THERE MAY BE DEEP DIFFERENCES OF OPINION, THEY ASK GOD THE CREATOR FOR GOOD MINDS, GOOD HEARTS, AND GOOD SPIRITS.

HAVING A GOOD MIND, A GOOD HEART, AND A GOOD SPIRIT IN DEALING WITH OTHERS IS A KEY ABORIGINAL TEACHING FOR LIVING IN RIGHT RELATIONSHIP. THERE ALWAYS WILL BE POTENTIAL FOR DISAGREEMENTS, MISUNDERSTANDINGS, THE RISK OF GETTING IT WRONG, WHEN PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT COME TOGETHER IN

RELATIONSHIP, BUT WHAT MATTERS IS WHAT IS IN THE MINDS, THE HEARTS, AND THE SPIRITS OF THE PEOPLES IN THAT RELATIONSHIP.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR. RESPECT AND VALUE EACH OTHER FOR WHAT MAKES YOU DIFFERENT. GIVE THANKS THAT PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT GIFTS TO SHARE. WELCOME EVERYONE AT THE TABLE. IF SOME AMONG YOU ARE HUNGRY, GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT. IF SOME ARE COLD, GIVE THEM SHELTER. REPENT! IF ANYONE HAS ANYTHING AGAINST YOU, GO AND BE RECONCILED TO THEM. THIS IS WHAT WE HAVE BEEN TAUGHT.

THIS IS WHAT HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IS ALL ABOUT.

PEACE BE WITH YOU.

MAY THE GLORY OF THE LORD ENDURE FOREVER. LET EVERYTHING THAT BREATHES PRAISE THE LORD! AMEN.

*Lori Ransom
April 2007*

Psalm 47
2 Cor. 5:14-21
Luke 24:44-53

HOW WE PROCLAIM CHRIST'S TRIUMPH

PLEASE PRAY WITH ME:

O SPIRIT, GRANT THAT WE MAY NEVER SEEK SO MUCH TO BE CONSOLED,
AS TO CONSOLE, TO BE UNDERSTOOD, AS TO UNDERSTAND, TO BE LOVED,
AS TO LOVE WITH ALL OUR HEARTS AND MINDS AND SPIRITS.

AND MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH, AND THE MEDIATIONS OF ALL OF
OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE TO YOU, OH GOD, OUR STRENGTH, OUR
ROCK, AND OUR REDEEMER. AMEN.

GOOD MORNING. I AM DELIGHTED TO BE WITH YOU ON THIS FINE
SUNDAY MORNING HERE IN ABBOTSFORD, AND I WANT TO THANK YOU
FOR INVITING ME TO SHARE REFLECTIONS ON OUR CHURCH'S MINISTRY
OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN
CANADA.

IT IS A SPECIAL DELIGHT FOR ME TO WORSHIP AT MY FRIEND HANS'
CHURCH. I GOT TO KNOW HANS A LITTLE LAST YEAR WHEN HE SERVED
AS MODERATOR OF THE 133RD GENERAL ASSEMBLY, AND PARTICULARLY
WHEN WE TRAVELLED TOGETHER TO OTTAWA, VANCOUVER, SASKATOON

AND WINNIPEG DURING THE ABORIGINAL AND CHURCH LEADERS' TOUR TO PROMOTE PLANS FOR THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION.

WE ALL LEARNED A GREAT DEAL DURING THAT TOUR, AND WERE DEEPLY MOVED BY OUR TIME WITH A NUMBER OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS, AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY.

WHO IN TURN RECOGNIZED IN HANS, AND IN THE OTHER CHURCH LEADERS, MEN OF GREAT SINCERITY, WITH COMPASSIONATE HEARTS, AND COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE FOR THE FIRST NATION, METIS AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF CANADA.

SO I WANT TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK YOU, HANS, AGAIN FOR REPRESENTING OUR CHURCH WITH SUCH GRACE AND FEELING AS WE WORK TO WALK TOGETHER WITH OUR FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS NEIGHBOURS.

AS _____ TOLD YOU, I AM AN ABORIGINAL PERSON, MYSELF. I AM A MEMBER OF THE ALGONQUINS OF PIKWAKANAGAN, OR GOLDEN LAKE, WHICH IS LOCATED ABOUT 150 KILOMETRES NORTHWEST OF OTTAWA.

AS IS CUSTOMARY AMONG ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT I ACKNOWLEDGE WITH THANKS, OUR OPPORTUNITY TO WORSHIP HERE IN

THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF THE COAST SALISH PEOPLES, WHO
HAVE LIVED IN THIS AREA FOR MANY CENTURIES.

WHEN I COME TO BRITISH COLUMBIA, WHICH HAS THE LARGEST NUMBER
OF INDIVIDUAL FIRST NATION COMMUNITIES IN CANADA: 198 . . . IT
MAKES ME THINK ABOUT THE INCREDIBLE DIVERSITY OF INDIGENOUS
PEOPLE IN CANADA, WHO EVEN TODAY SPEAK 60 DIFFERENT LANGUAGES,
AS PEOPLES OF OVER 50 DISTINCTIVE INDIGENOUS NATIONS.

AND JESUS SAID, YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES TO THE ENDS OF THE
EARTH.

THUS IT IS WRITTEN, THAT THE MESSIAH IS TO SUFFER AND TO RISE FROM
THE DEAD ON THE THIRD DAY, AND THAT REPENTANCE AND
FORGIVENESS OF SINS IS TO BE PROCLAIMED IN HIS NAME TO ALL
NATIONS. YOU ARE WITNESSES TO THESE THINGS.

REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS IS TO BE PREACHED TO ALL
NATIONS.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING REMINDS US THAT ON THE CHURCH'S
CALENDAR TODAY IS ASCENSION SUNDAY.

THE DAY WHICH MARKS THE END OF THAT UNIQUE PERIOD IN OUR EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST, BETWEEN HIS RESURRECTION AND THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AT PENTECOST, WHICH WE SHALL REMEMBER NEXT SUNDAY.

WE TEND TO THINK OF CHRIST'S TIME OF TEACHING THE DISCIPLES AS PRECEDING HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS. BUT THE TIME FOLLOWING HIS RESURRECTION WAS ALSO A TIME OF TEACHING, AND A SPECIAL TIME, DURING WHICH CHRIST HELPED THE DISCIPLES COME TO GRIPS WITH THEIR MISSION ON EARTH.

CHRIST LAID THE FOUNDATION FOR THE CHURCH'S MISSIONAL ROLE.

THE WORK OF WITNESSING FOLLOWS THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH. ST. PAUL PUTS IT THIS WAY, HE TELLS US WE ARE NOW CALLED TO BE CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS.

SO CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY; IN FACT, WE BELIEVE IT IS A BEGINNING, THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

THE LANGUAGE WE CHRISTIANS HAVE ADOPTED TO DESCRIBE THE VERY MYSTERIOUS, SUPERNATURAL EVENT OF THE RESURRECTED CHRIST'S

FINAL DEPARTURE FROM EARTH, HIS ASCENSION, TO SIT ON THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER, IS VERY INTERESTING.

TRADITIONALLY THE ASCENSION IS ROBED IN THE LANGUAGE OF VICTORY: CHRIST'S TRIUMPH, HIS TRIUMPH OVER SIN AND DEATH. CHRIST HAS TRIUMPHED. HALLELUJAH!

THE JOY AND DELIGHT AND FEELINGS OF HOPEFULNESS AND POSITIVE ENERGY EVOKED BY DESCRIBES OF THE ASCENSION TRIUMPH IS ENTIRELY JUSTIFIED. GOD, THROUGH CHRIST, HAS ASSURED US OF VICTORY OVER DEATH, THAT WE NEED NEVER AGAIN BE AFRAID, FOR WE HAVE BEEN RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST WHO LEFT HIS PEACE AMONG US, THE PEACE WHICH PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING.

PEACE BE WITH YOU. DO NOT BE AFRAID. AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, SO I SEND YOU.

AGAIN, WE HEAR IN CHRIST'S FINAL WORDS TO HIS DISCIPLES THAT CALL TO MISSION.

WE SING, O FILL US LORD WITH DAUNTLESS LOVE; SET HEART AND WILL ON THINGS ABOVE, THAT WE CONQUER THROUGH THY TRIUMPH; GRANT

GRACE SUFFICIENT FOR LIFE'S DAY, THAT BY OUR LIFE WE EVER SAY,
CHRIST HAS TRIUMPHED AND HE LIVETH.

THAT BY OUR LIFE WE EVER SAY; WE SING JOYFULLY ABOUT OUR
MISSION, THAT IS TO WITNESS TO CHRIST IN EVERYTHING WE DO AND
SAY.

THIS IS THE TEST TO WHICH EVERY CHRISTIAN MUST HOLD HIS OR HER
LIFE UP AGAINST. BY OUR LIVES DO WE SAY CHRIST HAS TRIUMPHED.

DO WE SOMETIMES CONFUSE CHRIST'S TRIUMPH WITH OUR OWN
NATURAL INCLINATION TO THINK WE ARE RIGHT. HAVE WE AT TIMES
PROCLAIMED NOT CHRIST TRIUMPHANT, BUT CHRISTIANS TRIUMPHANT?

AND DO WE SEE AND UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE?

MOREOVER, CHRIST'S TRIUMPH IS A PRETTY STRANGE LOOKING VICTORY
WHEN YOU COME RIGHT DOWN TO IT.

AFTER HIS RESURRECTION, CHRIST COUNTED FOR CERTAIN BUT A
HANDFUL OF MEN AND WOMEN AMONG HIS FOLLOWERS.

OPTIMISTICALLY, THERE WERE PERHAPS A FEW HUNDRED PEOPLE WHOSE
LIVES HE HAD TOUCHED, PARTICULARLY IN THE THREE YEARS OF HIS

ACTIVE MINISTRY ON EARTH, WHO REMEMBERED HIS TEACHINGS AND FOUND COMFORT AND HEALING IN HIS TOUCH.

HE DIED AN IGNOMINIOUS DEATH . . . ON THE CROSS . . . ALONGSIDE COMMON CRIMINALS.

BY THE DAY OF HIS ASCENSION, HIS CRUCIFIERS WERE ALREADY ON THE ROAD TO FORGETTING HIM. ROME STILL RULED THE HOLY LAND. THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL STILL LIVED MUCH AS THEY HAD LIVED ON THE DAY JESUS WAS BORN.

TRIUMPH? WHAT WAS THIS TRIUMPH?

JUST ABOUT A YEAR AGO, ON JUNE 11, 2008, TWELVE PEOPLE, DRESSED IN THEIR BEST, JOINED A FEW HUNDRED OTHER PEOPLE, SIMILARLY ATTIRED FOR A SPECIAL OCCASION, TO MAKE THEIR WAY INTO THE PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS IN OTTAWA.

IT WAS A WARM AND SUNNY DAY. GORGEOUS, IN FACT: PERFECT WEATHER.

THE GATHERING OF PEOPLE WAS COLOURFUL. AMONG THE WOMEN AND MEN IN BUSINESS ATTIRE WERE PEOPLE IN THE RED AND BLACK BUTTON

BLANKETS OF THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY; MEN IN RIBBON SHIRTS FROM THE PRAIRIES; AND WOMEN WITH COLOURFUL SHAWLS, SKIRTS AND TRADITIONAL JEWELRY FROM MANY DIFFERENT FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS COMMUNITIES AROUND THE COUNTRY..

I WAS FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE AMONG THE GROUP OF TWELVE PEOPLE, WHO HAD ARRIVED FOLLOWING A DELIGHTFUL LUNCHEON HOSTED BY THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA AT LE CAFE, THE RESTAURANT OF THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE.

OUR PARTY INCLUDED SEVEN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS. ANN, JOSEPHINE, AUDREY AND JUDY HAD ATTENDED SCHOOL AT BIRTLE, IN WESTERN MANITOBA NEAR BRANDON.

VIVIAN HAD GONE TO ANOTHER PRESBYTERIAN SCHOOL, CECILIA JEFFREY, NEAR KENORA, ONTARIO.

AND JUDY'S RELATIVES, HARRY AND DOLORES, HAD ATTENDED SCHOOLS RUN BY THE OBLATES.

ALSO WITH US WAS TYLER, VIVIAN'S 21-YEAR OLD SON, PROUDLY ADORNED WITH THE BADGE OF HIS GENERATION, AN IPOD.

ALSO WITH US WERE STEPHEN, IAN, AND CHEOL SOON, THE MODERATOR OF OUR LAST GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

WE ALL WERE ON OUR WAY TO LISTEN TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA MAKE AN APOLOGY TO SURVIVORS OF INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, TO VIVIAN AND JUDY, TO HARRY AND DOLORES, TO ANN, JOSEPHINE, AND TO AUDREY.

WE BASKED NOT ONLY IN BEAUTIFUL WEATHER THAT DAY, BUT IN A BEAUTIFUL FEELING.

TO A PERSON, THE FACES OF THOSE WE ENCOUNTERED THAT DAY WERE RICH WITH EMOTION. THERE WAS JOY, BUT NOT THE BOISTEROUS JOY OF A CROWD WHOSE TEAM HAS JUST WON THE STANLEY CUP, BUT THE GENTLE, QUIET, DEEPLY FELT JOY OF PEOPLE WHO ONCE DOUBTED, WHO DESPAIRED EVEN THAT LIFE COULD CHANGE FOR THE BETTER, NOW ARRIVING AT A DAY MANY LITERALLY THOUGHT THEY WOULD NEVER LIVE TO SEE AND EXPERIENCE.

THE NATIONAL CHIEF OF THE ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS, PHIL FONTAINE, UNDERLINED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS MOMENT IN OUR HISTORY, IN HIS RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S APOLOGY, WHEN HE SAID, "THIS DAY TESTIFIES TO NOTHING LESS THAN

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Sermon by Lori Ransom for Ascension and Healing and Reconciliation Sunday, May 24, 2009 at Calvin Presbyterian Church, Abbotsford, BC

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE IMPOSSIBLE.”

.....

LET’S THINK ABOUT THAT FOR A MOMENT. “THIS DAY TESTIFIES TO
NOTHING LESS THAN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE IMPOSSIBLE.”

WOW! THIS IS NOT JUST A THROW AWAY LINE, SAID IN THE EMOTIONAL
HEAT OF WHAT WAS CERTAINLY A MOMENT FRAUGHT WITH EMOTION.
THESE WORDS ARE FOUND IN HIS PREPARED TEXT. THIS TESTIFIES TO
NOTHING LESS THAN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE IMPOSSIBLE.” HE, AND
THE STAFF OF THE ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS, REFLECTED CAREFULLY
ON THESE WORDS, AND MADE A THOUGHTFUL CHOICE TO
ACKNOWLEDGE THAT FOR THEM, THE IMPOSSIBLE HAD BEEN ACHIEVED.
THE IMPOSSIBLE: ACHIEVED!

FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, RECONCILIATION AND THE JUST RESOLUTION
OF HISTORIC WRONGS HAVE LONG SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE.

FOR NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TOO, CANADIANS, WHO ARE THE
DESCENDANTS OF PEOPLE WHO EMIGRATED TO THIS COUNTRY DECADES
AND CENTURIES AGO, AS WELL AS FOR MORE RECENT IMMIGRANTS,
ISSUES PERTAINING TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND THEIR RIGHTS,
PARTICULARLY LAND CLAIMS RESOLUTION, ALSO SEEM IMPOSSIBLE,

*Sermon by Lori Ransom for Ascension and Healing and Reconciliation Sunday, May 24, 2009 at Calvin
Presbyterian Church, Abbotsford, BC*

DON'T THEY? THEY SEEM LIKE PROBLEMS THAT WILL NEVER BE RESOLVED, THAT WILL REMAIN AN ALBATROSS AROUND OUR NATION'S NECK, FOR DECADES, OR EVEN CENTURIES TO COME.

AND YET, LAST YEAR, ON JUNE 11TH, SOMETHING THAT SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE TOOK PLACE.

AS PEOPLE OF FAITH, SHOULD WE BE SURPRISED? HOW OFTEN, IN HISTORY, HAS GOD ACTED IN WAYS THAT SEEM IMPOSSIBLE?

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LET'S THINK ABOUT THE JOURNEY OF THESE SURVIVORS. ON JUNE 11TH WE SEE THEM TAKING PART IN WHAT WILL BE REMEMBERED AS HISTORIC EVENTS IN OUR NATION'S HISTORY, AS THE HONOURED GUESTS OF THE MODERATOR OF THE CHURCH WHICH HAD RUN THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS THEY ATTENDED.

IMAGINE THEIR JOURNEY TO THIS DAY! THINK BACK TO WHEN THEY WERE LITTLE CHILDREN; WHEN SOMEONE ARRIVED AT THEIR HOMES TO TAKE THEM AWAY FROM THEIR PARENTS, LEAVING THEM CRYING IN DISTRESS, BEWILDERED BY WHAT WAS HAPPENING; THINK ABOUT HOW THEY SUDDENLY FOUND THEMSELVES FAR AWAY AT A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL; WHERE THEY IMMEDIATELY WERE SEPARATED BROTHERS FROM

SISTERS, INTO SEPARATE, BOYS AND GIRLS DORMS, AND TAUGHT THAT THE LANGUAGE, CUSTOMS, AND WAYS OF LIVING OF THEIR PARENTS WERE WRONG, WHERE THEY WERE PUNISHED FOR SPEAKING TO EACH OTHER IN THEIR NATIVE TONGUES.

THINK OF HOW YEARS LATER, AS YOUNG ADULTS, THEY WENT BACK TO THEIR COMMUNITIES. HOW JOSEPHINE AND ANN, WHO HAD FOUND A BOND OF FRIENDSHIP AT SCHOOL, WERE SENT BACK TO COMMUNITIES SO SEPARATED FROM EACH OTHER THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE EACH OTHER FOR ANOTHER 50 YEARS.

THINK OF VIVIAN, WHOSE BROTHER WENT TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, BUT WHO LATER SUCCUMBED TO THE EFFECTS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE, HAVING STRUGGLED TO FIND A PLACE FOR HIMSELF IN SOCIETY UNSUCCESSFULLY, DESPITE THE SCHOOLING THAT WAS SUPPOSED TO MAKE HIM SUCCEED IN A “WHITE” WORLD.

HOW EASY WOULD IT HAVE BEEN FOR THESE INDIVIDUALS TO BELIEVE THAT SUCH A DAY WOULD COME: THAT THEIR NATION WOULD HOLD OUT THE HAND OF PEACE TO THEM, IN REPENTANCE, SEEKING FORGIVENESS.

THAT THE PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA WOULD TELL THEM, “YOU HAVE BEEN WORKING ON RECOVERING FROM THIS EXPERIENCE FOR A VERY LONG TIME, AND IN A VERY REAL SENSE, WE ARE NOW JOINING YOU ON THIS JOURNEY.” THE JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION BETWEEN PEOPLES.

ST. PAUL WRITES IN SECOND CORINTHIANS ABOUT THIS JOURNEY, REMINDING US THAT THIS IS THE WORK WE HAVE BEEN CALLED TO DO, THE WORK OF RECONCILIATION. THE MISSION CHRIST GAVE US ON ASCENSION DAY, ASSURING US, HIS DISCIPLES, THAT THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF GOD’S SPIRIT WILL BE WITH US.

SAYING PEACE BE WITH YOU, DO NOT BE AFRAID TO OPEN THE LOCKED DOORS AND GO OUT INTO THE WORLD AND BE RECONCILED TO EACH OTHER, AS GOD HAS RECONCILED HIMSELF TO US THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. CHRIST HAS TRIUMPHED. NOW IT’S OUR TURN. TO PROCLAIM CHRIST’S TRIUMPH THROUGH HOW WE LIVE OUR LIVES, AND CARRY OUT CHRIST’S CALL TO US TO BE HIS AMBASSADORS, HIS MINISTERS OF RECONCILIATION, LOVING ALL PEOPLES AS OURSELVES.

THIS YEAR, 2009, WE IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA REMEMBER THAT IT HAS BEEN 15-YEARS SINCE WE MADE OUR OWN APOLOGY, OUR CONFESSION OF 1994, IN WHICH WE MADE A PROMISE TO WALK WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO FIND HEALING AND WHOLENESS TOGETHER AS ALL GOD’S PEOPLE.

DARE WE BELIEVE THAT OUR NATION'S APOLOGY, AND OUR CHURCH'S CONFESSION, MAY BE READ AS PROCLAMATIONS OF CHRIST'S TRIUMPH, AS TESTIMONIES TO ALL NATIONS THAT WE BELIEVE IN REPENTANCE AND THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS THROUGH CHRIST. APOLOGY AS TRIUMPH? HOW STRANGE, HOW IMPOSSIBLE.

AND WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? WHAT'S NEXT ON OUR JOURNEY TOWARDS RECONCILIATION. IT IS CLEAR THAT OUR WORK IS NOT DONE.

OUR LORD WALKED THIS WALK BEFORE US. WE HAVE HEARD HOW CHRIST INVITED THOSE WHO WERE IGNORED AND EXCLUDED BY OTHERS TO BE WITH HIM, TO TALK TO HIM, TO GET TO KNOW HIM, TO BREAK BREAD WITH HIM, TO SHARE WITH HIM.

IN MANY WAYS, THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA IS LEADING THE WAY IN CANADA TOWARDS RECONCILIATION WITH FIRST PEOPLES. THE MANY PLACES IN WHICH COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES ARE SITTING DOWN AT TABLES TO NEGOTIATE MODERN TREATIES AND RESOURCE SHARING AGREEMENTS, SPEAK TO A LIVING EFFORT TO RECONCILE, TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO LIVE TOGETHER IN A GOOD WAY.

BUT I SUSPECT THAT LIKE PEOPLE IN MANY PARTS OF CANADA, THE PEOPLE OF THIS PROVINCE REMAIN EAGER TO LEARN MORE ABOUT FIRST NATIONS HISTORY, CULTURE, OR SPIRITUALITY.

YOU MAY WISH TO INVITE AN ABORIGINAL SPIRITUAL LEADER, AN ELDER, AN ACADEMIC, AN ARTIST TO SPEAK TO YOU ON SOME FUTURE SUNDAY, OR SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL EVENT: PERHAPS SOME ARE EAGER TO TALK TO A NATIVE BUSINESS OR COMMUNITY LEADER TO DISCUSS CURRENT ISSUES OF COMMON CONCERN TO PEOPLE HERE IN ABBOTSFORD AND THE SURROUNDING AREA.

YOU MAY WISH TO WORK WITH MARY AND RUTH TO PLAN A VISIT TO A NATIVE COMMUNITY.

OR GATHER A GROUP TOGETHER TO VIEW A FILM BY ONE OF THE MANY WONDERFUL ABORIGINAL FILMMAKERS, OR READ AND DISCUSS A BOOK BY AN ABORIGINAL AUTHOR, AT A SOCIAL GATHERING.

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE WORK OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION.

WE LOOK FORWARD AS WELL TO THE WORK OF CANADA'S TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION. THIS COMMISSION IS OUR COMMISSION,

Sermon by Lori Ransom for Ascension and Healing and Reconciliation Sunday, May 24, 2009 at Calvin Presbyterian Church, Abbotsford, BC

THE CHURCHES SIGNED THE AGREEMENT THAT GIVES A MANDATE TO THE COMMISSION TO HELP CANADIANS, ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, TO LEARN THE STORY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, AND THE ONGOING IMPACT OF THE SCHOOLS AND OUR COLONIAL HISTORY OF FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLE. AND ON NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

I FIND THAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ARE VERY KEEN TO FIND OUT, WHAT DO NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE MEAN BY “RECONCILIATION,” WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO US? ALL CANADIANS HAVE A ROLE IN ANSWERING THAT QUESTION.

WE HAVE MUCH TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER, ABOUT OUR ANCESTORS: NOT ONLY THOSE WHO WENT TO THE SCHOOLS, BUT THOSE WHO WORKED IN THEM, WHO TAUGHT THERE, WHO COOKED, WHO LOOKED AFTER THE PROPERTY, WHO FELT THEY WERE RESPONDING TO A CALL TO MISSION, AT A TIME NOT SO LONG AGO, BUT THAT FEELS EVER SO DISTANT TO OUR CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF HOW PEOPLE SHOULD TREAT EACH OTHER. WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THEM ABOUT HOW WE SEE MISSION AND MINISTRY TODAY? AND WHAT HAVE WE TO TEACH THOSE WHO WILL FOLLOW US IN THE FAITH?

ON THIS ASCENSION SUNDAY WE REMEMBER CHRIST'S FINAL WORDS TO US TO GO OUT INTO THE WORLD TRIUMPHANT IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT EVERYONE WHO LOVES IS BORN OF GOD AND KNOWS GOD. SINCE GOD LOVED US SO MUCH, WE ALSO OUGHT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

GOD HAS GONE UP WITH A SHOUT, THE LORD WITH THE SOUND OF A TRUMPET.

SING PRAISES TO GOD, SING PRAISES.

NOW ALL THE VAULT OF HEAVEN RESOUND. CHRIST HAS TRIUMPHED.

JESUS LIVETH. HALLELUJAH! HALLELUJAH!

AMEN.

Amos 8:1-12
Psalm 52
Cor. 5:14-21
Luke 8:16-21

PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU LISTEN

LET US PRAY:

MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH, THE REFLECTIONS OF OUR MINDS, AND RESPONSES OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE UNTO YOU OH GOD, OUR STRENGTH AND OUR REDEEMER, AMEN.

THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH FOR YOUR INVITATION TO BE WITH YOU ON THIS BEAUTIFUL SUNDAY MORNING, IN BRACEBRIDGE. IT IS GOOD TO BE OUT OF TORONTO. AND IT IS GOOD TO HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT WITH YOU ON THE TOPIC OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE. AND ON OUR THEME, THIS MORNING, THE PRACTICE OF LISTENING.

AS _____ MENTIONED IN INTRODUCING ME, I AM A MEMBER OF THE ALGONQUINS OF PIKWAKANGAN, WHICH IS ON THE SOUTHEASTERN EDGE OF ALGONQUIN PROVINCIAL PARK. AND AS IS TRADITIONAL AMONG NATIVE PEOPLE, I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE ARE IN THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF ALGONKIAN SPEAKING PEOPLES, INCLUDING THE OJIBWAY AND CHIPPEWA.

I'M CHEATING A LITTLE, THIS MORNING. THE FIRST TWO READINGS THIS MORNING ARE STRAIGHT OUT OF THE LECTIONARY FOR TODAY. THE OTHER TWO ARE MY OWN SUBSTITUTIONS.

WHY, YOU MIGHT WONDER, DID I BOTHER TO KEEP THE AMOS READING. IT'S PRETTY BREATHTAKING IN ITS APOCALYPTIC TONE: THE END HAS COME UPON MY PEOPLE ISRAEL, THE DEAD BODIES SHALL BE MANY, SAYS THE LORD, I WILL MAKE THE SUN GO DOWN AT NOON. ETCETERA. ETCETERA.

EVEN THE BASKET OF SUMMER FRUIT, THAT SEEMINGLY COZY IMAGE AT THE START OF THE READING, IS NOT WHAT IT SEEMS. IT TURNS OUT THE HEBREW WORDS FOR "SUMMER FRUIT" ARE A PLAY ON WORDS WITH THE HEBREW FOR "END" AS IN THE END OF THE WORLD HAS COME.

AMOS IS MAKING A PRETTY POWERFUL PITCH HERE. ONE MIGHT EVEN SAY, A DESPERATE PITCH. HIS WORDS ARE SO OVERBLOWN, THERE IS A DANGER, THEY WILL BE IGNORED. THEY SEEM FANTASTIC, EXAGGERATED, A LOT OF REALLY HOT AIR.

BUT, LEST WE OURSELVES GET CAUGHT UP IN THINKING AMOS IS SPOUTING A LOT OF OLD TESTAMENT MUMBO JUMBO, *LISTEN* AGAIN, TO THE CONCLUSION TO THE PASSAGE: "THE TIME IS SURELY COMING, SAYS

THE LORD GOD, WHEN I WILL SEND A FAMINE ON THE LAND; NOT A FAMINE OF BREAD, OR A THIRST FOR WATER, BUT OF HEARING THE WORDS OF THE LORD.

“THEY SHALL WANDER FROM SEA TO SEA, AND FROM NORTH TO EAST; THEY SHALL RUN TO AND FRO, SEEKING THE WORD OF THE LORD, BUT THEY SHALL NOT FIND IT.”

NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO LISTEN, ANY MORE, TO GOD’S WORDS.

WHY IS THAT? DO YOU THINK? WHY WOULD GOD THREATEN TO KEEP HIS WORDS FROM THE PEOPLE OF THE EARTH?

OLD TESTAMENT MUMBO JUMBO?

LET’S LOOK AT THE NEW TESTAMENT. THE ACTUAL LECTIONARY TEXT FOR THIS SUNDAY IS THE FAMILIAR STORY OF MARY AND MARTHA. I’M SURE YOU REMEMBER IT. JESUS COMES TO VISIT. MARTHA FUSSES ABOUT, TRYING TO BE THE PERFECT HOSTESS, MAKING SURE JESUS’ EVERY NEED IS ATTENDED TO, EXCEPT THAT SHE DOESN’T ACTUALLY STOP LONG ENOUGH TO VISIT WITH HIM, TO TALK TO HIM, AND TO *LISTEN* TO HIM. IN FACT, MARTHA GETS ANNOYED THAT MARY IS NOT HELPING

HER, BUT IS INSTEAD SPENDING ALL HER ENERGY, PUTTING HER HEART AND SOUL, INTO THE BUSINESS OF LISTENING TO JESUS.

JESUS TELLS MARTHA, NOT THAT HE FEELS NEGLECTED, BUT RATHER, THAT MARY “HAS CHOSEN THE BETTER PART, WHICH WILL NOT BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HER.” MARY HAS CHOSEN TO LISTEN TO JESUS. TO LISTEN TO GOD’S WORDS. THIS WILL NOT BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HER.

LET’S EXPLORE THIS CALL TO LISTEN SOME MORE, AND LOOK AT TODAY’S READING FROM LUKE: “NO ONE AFTER LIGHTING A LAMP HIDES IT, . . . SO THAT THOSE WHO ENTER MAY SEE THE LIGHT. FOR NOTHING IS HIDDEN THAT WILL NOT BE DISCLOSED, NOR IS ANYTHING SECRET THAT WILL NOT BECOME KNOWN AND COME TO LIGHT. THEN PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU LISTEN.”

THE EMPHASIS ON LISTENING SEEMS INCONGRUOUS, DOESN’T IT? PARTICULARLY BESIDE THIS LITERALLY BRIGHT IMAGE OF A LAMP. THE LAMP IS A VISUAL IMAGE, NOT AN AURAL ONE. BUT WHEN WE THINK ABOUT IT, WHEN WE PAY ATTENTION TO THESE WORDS, WE REMEMBER LISTENING TO INTERPRETERS DISCUSS THIS LIGHT AS THE LIGHT OF CHRIST, THE WORD OF CHRIST, THE WORD OF GOD. CHRIST IS THE LIGHT SHINING IN THE WORLD, ILLUMINATING FOR US HOW GOD WOULD HAVE US LIVE, THROUGH HIS WORDS TO US.

AND ONCE WE HEAR CHRIST'S WORDS, ONCE WE LISTEN TO HIM, WE CANNOT LIVE, WE SHOULD NOT LIVE, BY ANY OTHER WORDS. AND WE TOO ARE CHARGED NOT TO HIDE THIS LIGHT FROM OTHERS, TO LISTEN BUT DO NOTHING.

THIS IS WHY, I THINK, JESUS REMINDS US TO, PAY ATTENTION TO HOW WE LISTEN. THE ATTITUDE WE TAKE IN LISTENING, WHAT WE DO IN THE PROCESS OF LISTENING, AND AFTER WE HAVE LISTENED, ARE ALL CRITICAL.

BUT HOLD ON A MOMENT, *LISTEN* TO THE WORDS THAT FOLLOW: "THEN PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU LISTEN; FOR TO THOSE WHO HAVE, MORE WILL BE GIVEN; AND FROM THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE, EVEN WHAT THEY SEEM TO HAVE WILL BE TAKEN AWAY."

HOW'S YOUR LISTENING GOING?

"TO THOSE WHO HAVE, MORE WILL BE GIVEN." IT'S ALL TOO EASY TO READ THIS AS "MORE" IN TERMS OF MATERIAL GOODS, ISN'T IT? MORE "STUFF" IN TODAY'S VERNACULAR. AND FROM THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE, EVEN WHAT THEY SEEM TO HAVE WILL BE TAKEN AWAY. DOES THIS LITERALLY MEAN THE POOR WILL BECOME POORER. THERE'S NO

HOPE FOR THEM? OR ARE WE READING THESE LINES WITH TOO GREAT A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY POINT OF VIEW?

DO THESE LINES NOT REMIND US A LITTLE OF THE WARNING OF OUR OLD TESTAMENT FRIEND AMOS?

TIME AND TIME AGAIN, AMOS AND OTHER PROPHETS CALLED THE PEOPLE TO REPENTANCE, PEOPLE WHO SEEMED TO HAVE HEARD THE WORD OF GOD. BUT THEY DID NOT LISTEN. AND BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT LISTENED, AMOS TELLS THEM THEY ARE IN DANGER OF LOSING ACCESS TO GOD'S WORDS, OF HAVING GOD'S WORDS TAKEN AWAY FROM THEM, BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT REALLY LISTENING TO GOD. THEY ARE TRAMPLING ON THE NEEDY AND BRINGING RUIN TO THE POOR OF THE LAND. THIS IS NOT LISTENING.

LOOKING AT IT WITH AMOS' EYES, MIGHT WE NOT PARAPHRASE THE DIFFICULT PHRASES FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL AS, "THINK ABOUT HOW YOU LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF THE BIBLE. FOLLOW CHRIST'S TEACHINGS, AND YOU WILL GROW IN THE KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE OF GOD. DON'T LISTEN WITH ONE EAR, AND LET HIS WORDS SLIP OUT THE OTHER, OR IT'LL BE AS IF THEY WERE TAKEN AWAY.

TO BE SURE ABOUT THIS, LET'S READ THE PASSAGE TO ITS CONCLUSION.
HOW SERIOUS IS GOD ABOUT THIS MATTER OF LISTENING?

LUKE TELLS US THAT JESUS WENT SO FAR AS TO ALMOST DISMISS HIS
OWN FAMILY FOR NOT LISTENING TO HIM: "YOUR MOTHER AND YOUR
BROTHERS ARE WANTING TO SEE YOU. [HE IS TOLD.] BUT [JESUS] SAID TO
THEM, MY MOTHER AND MY BROTHERS ARE THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD
OF GOD, AND DO IT."

PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU LISTEN.

WHEN I READ THESE PASSAGES, AND IN PARTICULAR, AMOS'S, DARE I
SAY, TIRADE, AND THOUGHT ABOUT MY WORK IN HEALING AND
RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE. I COULDN'T HELP BUT
THINK ABOUT THE RECENT NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION, ON JUNE 29TH.

YOU'LL REMEMBER THAT EVENTS WERE HELD THAT DAY BY
ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, ACROSS THE COUNTRY, TO DRAW ATTENTION TO
POVERTY IN FIRST NATION COMMUNITIES, TO ONGOING NEEDS,
PARTICULARLY IN REMOTE NORTHERN COMMUNITIES, FOR CLEAN
WATER, GOOD HOUSING, AND HIGHER QUALITY EDUCATION FOR
ABORIGINAL CHILDREN.

THE EVENTS WERE ALSO MEANT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO UNSETTLED LAND CLAIMS, INSTANCES WHERE OUR COUNTRY HAS BROKEN PROMISES TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, BROKEN CANADA'S OWN LAWS IN FACT.

AND, I WONDERED, DO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE SOUND LIKE AMOS TO MOST CANADIANS? HOW DO CANADIANS *LISTEN* TO THE CRIES OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, ON A NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION?

HAVE WE NOT HEARD A LONG LIST OF NATIVE PROPHETS, SOME MIGHT SAY DEMAGOGUES, OTHERS MIGHT CALL THEM SAINTS, LET'S CALL THEM ORDINARY, HUMAN, NATIVE LEADERS, HAVE WE NOT HEARD SUCH NATIVE LEADERS REPEAT THESE CRIES AGAIN AND AGAIN?

HOW DO WE LISTEN TO NATIVE PEOPLE? HOW DO WE REACT WHEN WE HEAR THEIR CRIES. WITH TIREDNESS? ARE WE TIRED OF HEARING THEM? DO WE THINK, HERE WE GO AGAIN, WE ALREADY KNOW ABOUT THESE PROBLEMS? WHY DO WE HAVE TO HEAR ABOUT THESE PROBLEMS AGAIN?

DO WE REACT WITH ANGER, FRUSTRATION, WEARINESS, OR INDIFFERENCE. DO WE JUST TRY TO TUNE IT ALL OUT? DO WE HEAR A BROKEN RECORD?

MAYBE OUR REACTION IS QUITE DIFFERENT. WE'RE VERY SYMPATHETIC TO WHAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ARE SAYING. WE DON'T BLAME THEM FOR SPEAKING UP. WE'RE JUST AS FRUSTRATED, EVEN ANGRY PERHAPS, THAT MORE HASN'T BEEN DONE TO HELP THEM.

WE DON'T EVEN MIND BEING TEMPORARILY INCONVENIENCED BY AN INFORMATION PICKET ACROSS A HIGHWAY. WE WANT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO HAVE STRONG AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES. WE WANT ACTION TAKEN TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN. WE WANT FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT. BUT, DO WE FEEL A NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT? HOW DO WE, IN FACT, LISTEN?

HOW WOULD GOD WANT US TO LISTEN TO WHAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ARE SAYING?

AND WHAT IS THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA SAYING, AND DOING, ABOUT HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE? IS THE CHURCH, ON AN INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL, REALLY LISTENING?

I CAN REPORT THAT THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA HAS BEEN BOLD ENOUGH TO CLAIM THAT WE HAVE BEEN LISTENING.

IN OUR CONFESSION OF 1994, OUR CONFESSION CONCERNING THE IMPACT OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, WE STATED THAT WE HAVE BEEN LISTENING NOT ONLY TO NATIVE PEOPLE, BUT ALSO TO GOD.

WE SAID, “THE HOLY SPIRIT, SPEAKING IN AND THROUGH SCRIPTURE, CALLS THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA TO CONFESSION. THIS CONFESSION IS OUR RESPONSE TO THE WORD OF GOD.”

OUR CHURCH, IN MAKING ITS CONFESSION, PROCLAIMED BEFORE GOD AND HUMANKIND THAT WE ARE LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD. WE CLAIM WE ARE PAYING ATTENTION TO HOW WE LISTEN.

WE WENT ON TO SAY, THAT “WE UNDERSTAND OUR MISSION AND MINISTRY IN NEW WAYS IN PART BECAUSE OF THE TESTIMONY OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES.” HERE WE ACKNOWLEDGED THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, THEMSELVES, HEARING THEIR TESTIMONY—REMEMBERING OUR TEACHING THAT GOD SPEAKS THROUGH ALL OF US, THAT WE CAN SEE THE LIGHT OF GOD IN EACH OTHER, IF WE LOOK CAREFULLY, AND IF WE STOP TO LISTEN, CAREFULLY.

OUR CONFESSION ASKED GOD TO FORGIVE US FOR NOT EVEN LISTENING TO THE PROPHETIC VOICES WITHIN OUR OWN DENOMINATION, WHO AT

THE TIME OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, “WERE AWARE OF THE DAMAGE THAT WAS BEING DONE,” BUT WHOSE CRIES FOR JUSTICE WERE IGNORED.

GOD NOT ONLY ASKS US TO PAY ATTENTION TO HIM, BUT TO PAY ATTENTION TO EACH OTHER.

THE GOOD NEWS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT IS THAT GOD, ULTIMATELY, DID NOT GIVE UP ON US. HE DID NOT TAKE HIS WORD AWAY FROM US. BUT NOT COUNTING OUR TRESPASSES AGAINST US, HE FORGAVE US, FOR NOT ALWAYS LISTENING AND ACTING ON WHAT HE TOLD US. HE HAS FAITH IN US. HE TRUSTS US. HE HAS SHOWN US HOW TO RECONCILE, THROUGH THE LIFE AND WITNESS OF JESUS CHRIST. AND HE TRUSTS US TO CARRY ON THAT MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION WITH OTHERS.

AND SO IN OUR CONFESSION, WE PROMISED, WITH GOD’S GUIDANCE, TO SEEK OPPORTUNITIES TO WALK WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES TO FIND HEALING AND WHOLENESS TOGETHER AS GOD’S PEOPLE. WE PROMISED TO SEEK RECONCILIATION, TO BE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, AND TO NO LONGER MISREPRESENT HIM TO OTHERS, AS WE DID WHEN WE COOPERATED WITH GOVERNMENT IN POLICIES OF ASSIMILIATION, INCLUDING THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS SYSTEM.

SO WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE US TODAY, IN 2007? HOW IS THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA LIVING UP TO ITS PROMISE TO WALK TOGETHER WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO FIND HEALING AND WHOLENESS? AND THE IMPLICIT PROMISE NEVER TO IGNORE THEIR CRIES FOR JUSTICE EVER AGAIN?

AND HOW SHOULD, HOW CAN INDIVIDUAL PRESBYTERIANS PARTICIPATE IN LIVING UP TO THAT PROMISE, AND PUT WORDS INTO ACTION?

MANY OF YOU WILL BE AWARE THAT OUR CHURCH, ALONG WITH THE OTHER CHURCHES WHICH RAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, SIGNED AN AGREEMENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA AND THE ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS: THE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT. WE ARE VERY CLOSE TO LEARNING WHETHER THE AGREEMENT WILL BE RATIFIED, SO TO SPEAK, BY ALL THE PARTIES, MOST IMPORTANTLY BY THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS THEMSELVES. SOME 80,000 OF WHOM ARE STILL ALIVE IN CANADA TODAY.

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD ABOUT THE MONETARY COMPENSATION WHICH IS PART OF THIS AGREEMENT: \$10,000 FOR EVERY RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL “SURVIVOR” – AS THEY CALL THEMSELVES – PLUS ADDITIONAL MONEY DEPENDING ON HOW LONG THEY ATTENDED SCHOOL.

THE AGREEMENT ALSO PROVIDES A SEPARATE PROCESS FOR SEEKING COMPENSATION IF, MOST GRIEVOUSLY, A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVOR CAN SHOW THEY WERE PHYSICALLY OR SEXUALLY ABUSED AT SCHOOL.

WHILE THE MONETARY COMPENSATION IS HELPFUL, AND IN MANY INSTANCES WILL HELP INDIVIDUALS LIVE OUT THEIR DAYS IN GREATER MATERIAL COMFORT THAN THEY HAVE HAD FOR MUCH OF THEIR LIVES. AS IMPORTANT AS SOME FINANCIAL REDRESS IS. MANY ABORIGINAL PEOPLE BELIEVE THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF THE AGREEMENT ARE THE PROVISIONS FOR TELLING THEIR STORY, FOR PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CANADIANS TO LISTEN TO WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM, TO LEARN ABOUT AND TO LEARN FROM THEIR DREADFUL EXPERIENCE.

THE AGREEMENT PROVIDES FOR COMMEMORATIVE EVENTS IN COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, AND FOR A CANADIAN TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION.

I WANT TO ENCOURAGE ALL OF YOU HERE TODAY TO FOLLOW THE WORK OF THIS COMMISSION, WHICH SHOULD BEGIN ITS WORK BY EARLY NEXT YEAR. AND, IF IT'S POSSIBLE, PARTICIPATE IN A COMMEMORATIVE EVENT IN A NEARBY NATIVE COMMUNITY.

THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION'S WORK WILL BE HISTORIC. THE COMMISSION WILL LISTEN TO AND RECORD, BEFORE IT IS NO LONGER POSSIBLE, THE VOICES OF THOSE WHO HAD DIRECT EXPERIENCE OF THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM.

CONSIDER PUTTING ASIDE THE TIME TO LISTEN TO AT LEAST ONE SURVIVOR OF A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL TELL THEIR STORY TO THE COMMISSION. AT LEAST ONE STORY.

ONE STORY OF A CHILDHOOD SPENT AWAY FROM ONE'S FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND CULTURE AT A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL CAN TRANSFORM OUR UNDERSTANDING OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TODAY. SUCH STORIES SHOULD BE AVAILABLE TO ALL CANADIANS THROUGH THE MEDIA, ONCE THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION BEGINS ITS WORK.

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO REMEMBER THAT THE CHRISTIAN PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION IS NOT ABOUT LAYING ON GUILT TRIPS OR ASSIGNING BLAME.

OUR CONFESSION REMINDS US THAT, "WE ARE CALLED TO SPEAK TO THE CHURCH WE LOVE NOT OUT OF ANY SENSE OF BEING SUPERIOR TO THOSE

WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US, NOR OUT OF ANY SENSE THAT WE WOULD HAVE DONE THINGS DIFFERENTLY IN THE SAME CONTEXT.”

WE NEED TO REMEMBER WITH LOVE, AND TO OFFER SUPPORT, TO THOSE WITHIN OUR CHURCH WHO WORKED HARD AT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, WHO TRIED THEIR BEST, AND WHO ARE NOW STRUGGLING TO RECONCILE THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH NEW UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE IMPACT OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND THEIR COMMUNITIES. WE NEED TO PAY ATTENTION TO HOW WE LISTEN TO THEM AS WELL.

THIS IS ANOTHER REASON WHY THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION WILL BE SO IMPORTANT. THE COMMISSION HAS POTENTIAL TO BE AN AGENT OF RECONCILIATION, THAT WILL GUIDE US IN OUR JOURNEY FORWARD AS A NATION, AS A PEOPLE, IN OVERCOMING THE DAMAGE DONE TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND THEIR COMMUNITIES, IN ASSISTING THOSE WHO WORKED AT THE SCHOOLS TO PROCESS CONFLICTING EXPERIENCES AND EMOTIONS, AND IN HELPING NON-ABORIGINAL CANADIANS TO DEMONSTRATE IN CONCRETE WAYS OUR REPENTANCE AND DESIRE FOR RECONCILIATION.

LOCALLY, I ENCOURAGE YOU TO FIND WAYS TO REACH OUT AND GET TO KNOW YOUR ABORIGINAL NEIGHBOURS. PERHAPS SOME OF YOU HERE

TODAY KNOW PEOPLE AT MOOSE DEER POINT, OR BEAUSOLEIL ON CHRISTIAN ISLAND, OR WASAUKSING, AT PARRY ISLAND, OR IN ANOTHER COMMUNITY. ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WHO MIGHT MAKE A VISIT TO KNOX BRACEBRIDGE.

YOU MAY WISH TO INVITE AN ABORIGINAL GUEST TO SPEAK, AT A LUNCHEON OR DINNER. YOU MAY WISH TO MEET AN ABORIGINAL SPIRITUAL LEADER, AN ELDER, OR AN ACADEMIC. PERHAPS AN ARTIST, A SINGER, AN ACTOR. IF IT PROVES HARD TO MEET ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, FIND OTHER WAYS TO LISTEN TO ABORIGINAL VOICES. RADIO PROGRAMMES, THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES TELEVISION NETWORK. ACCESS THE AMAZING LIBRARY OF FILMS BY AND ABOUT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE FROM OUR NATIONAL FILM BOARD.

WE KNOW, AS CHRISTIANS, THAT CULTURAL AND SPORTING EVENTS, TIMES OF FELLOWSHIP, OFTEN PROVIDE THE BEST SETTINGS IN WHICH TO MAKE NEW FRIENDSHIPS. IN THE SUMMER TIME, ABORIGINAL PEOPLE HOLD FESTIVALS, POW WOWS, IN THEIR COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. DID YOU KNOW THAT TRADITIONAL POW WOWS ARE EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE TO THE CREATOR? AND ALL ARE WELCOME AT THESE CEREMONIES.

I BELIEVE THAT THE PROCESS OF GETTING TO KNOW ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, LISTENING TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, HAS POTENTIAL FAR BEYOND THAT OF GETTING A BETTER APPRECIATION FOR EACH OTHER, OF ENJOYING NEW AND DIFFERENT CULTURAL EXPERIENCES, AND OF DISCOVERING COMMON TEACHINGS FROM OF OUR DIFFERENT SPIRITUAL PRACTICES . . .

I'M CONVINCED, THAT IN THE SEEMINGLY SIMPLE PROCESS OF TALKING WITH EACH OTHER, AND LISTENING TO EACH OTHER, THE LONGER WE SPEND TIME LISTENING, ESPECIALLY, WE COLLECTIVELY – ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE -- WILL START TO GAIN NEW INSIGHTS INTO WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO ADDRESS THE ONGOING ISSUES IN OUR RELATIONSHIP.

NEW INSIGHTS ARE NEEDED. NEW PARTNERSHIPS IN COMMUNITY BUILDING NEED TO BE FORGED. NEW VOICES ARE REQUIRED. VOICES OF ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL FRIENDS. VOICES OF NEIGHBOURS. VOICES, WHO REMEMBER THE VOICE OF CHRIST, WHO SPOKE FOR THOSE WHO OTHERS IGNORED. WHAT DID CHRIST SAY ABOUT PEOPLE ON THE MARGINS OF HIS SOCIETY? WHAT DID HE ASK US TO DO? HOW DO WE LISTEN AND INTERPRET CHRIST'S TEACHINGS IN OUR CHURCHES AND

COMMUNITIES IN CANADA TODAY? ARE WE PAYING ATTENTION TO HOW WE LISTEN?

THERE IS A NEW CREATION. EVERYTHING OLD HAS PASSED AWAY, EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW. WE HAVE BEEN TAUGHT FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS, TO THE NEW COVENANT SEALED IN CHRIST'S BLOOD, THAT OUR MISSION AS THE CHURCH IS TO LISTEN TO GOD'S WORDS, TO ABSORB THEM, TO ACT ON THEM, AND TO LISTEN TO EACH OTHER AND BE RECONCILED TO EACH OTHER IN CHRIST'S LOVE.

WE ARE CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS. LET US REJOICE AND BE GLAD IN THIS OUR CALLING!

AMEN.

2 Cor. 5:14-21; Mark 1:14-20

RECONCILIATION AND ROBBIE BURNS

LET US PRAY: CREATOR SPIRIT, COMFORTER, ADVOCATE, GRANT THAT WE MAY NEVER SEEK SO MUCH TO BE CONSOLED, AS TO CONSOLE, TO BE UNDERSTOOD, AS TO UNDERSTAND, TO BE LOVED, AS TO LOVE WITH ALL OUR HEARTS, OUR MINDS AND OUR SPIRITS.

AND MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH, AND THE MEDIATIONS OF ALL OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE TO YOU, OH GOD, OUR STRENGTH, OUR ROCK, AND OUR REDEEMER. AMEN

GOOD MORNING! I AM DELIGHTED TO SPEAK TO YOU ON THIS BEAUTIFUL WINTER MORNING IN CARLETON PLACE. IT IS ESPECIALLY NICE TO BE HERE, AS MY ROOTS ARE IN THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY. MY PARENTS, AND THEIR PARENTS LIVED THERE LIVES IN THESE PARTS. MY MOTHER'S ANCESTORS, HAILING FROM PRUSSIA, AND DENMARK, IRELAND, AND SCOTLAND.

AND MY FATHER'S FROM ENGLAND AND FROM THE ALGONKIAN NATION.

WE ARE IN ALGONQUIN TERRITORY. THIS IS MY HOMELAND AS A MEMBER OF THE ALGONQUINS OF PIKWAKANAGAN, A COMMUNITY

WHICH IS LOCATED NEAR EGANVILLE, ON THE SOUTHEASTERN EDGE OF ALGONQUIN PROVINCIAL PARK. MANY OF YOU MAY KNOW THAT AREA.

MY PARENTS CERTAINLY KNOW CARLETON PLACE WELL. I SUSPECT MY DAD PLAYED HOCKEY HERE, OVER HALF A CENTURY AGO, WITH THE INKERMEN ROCKETS.

AND SO IT IS THAT I WAS DELIGHTED TO BE ASKED TO JOIN YOU TODAY TO PREACH A SERMON ON THE THEME OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION IN CANADA, A SERMON ABOUT RECONCILIATION WITH MY FIRST NATION, METIS, AND INUIT BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

THE APOSTLE PAUL TELLS US, WITH RINGING ENTHUSIASM AND CLARITY, IN OUR READING FROM SECOND CORINTHIANS, THAT RECONCILIATION IS OUR CALLING.

WE ARE CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS, PAUL WRITES: HIS MINISTERS OF RECONCILIATION. CHRIST HAS RECONCILED US TO GOD, AND HAS GIVEN US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION. OUR LOVE OF CHRIST URGES US ON. WE ARE URGED TO LOVE, LIKE CHRIST, BEING REMINDED THAT WHEN WE LOVE LIKE CHRIST WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD!

IT'S AN ASTONISHING PROMISE. A WONDERFUL, HOPEFUL PROMISE. A LIFE GIVING, RENEWING PROMISE.

EVERYTHING OLD HAS PASSED AWAY! SEE EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW!

MY ALGONQUIN GRANDMOTHER, JUDY RANSOM, MUST HAVE HAD A SIMILAR SENSE OF HOPEFULNESS, A VISION OF THE OLD PASSING AWAY, AND EVERYTHING BECOMING NEW, WHEN SHE MADE A DECISION, A RISKY DECISION, AN UNUSUAL DECISION IN ITS DAY, WHEN AS A VERY YOUNG WOMAN, SHE LEFT PIKWAKANAGAN, IN THE 1920S, TO SEEK OUT A NEW LIFE FIRST IN TORONTO, AND SOON AFTER IN OTTAWA, WHERE SHE HAD HER FAMILY AND LIVED OUT HER LIFE.

GRANNY JUDY MUST HAVE BEEN A REMARKABLE WOMAN, FOR IT CANNOT HAVE BEEN EASY FOR A YOUNG SINGLE WOMAN, AN ABORIGINAL WOMAN, TO LEAVE HER FAMILY AND HER COMMUNITY TO SEEK OUT A NEW LIFE IN THE BIG CITY, IN CANADA, IN THE 1920S. AS AN ABORIGINAL WOMAN, SHE COULD NOT HAVE EXPECTED THE GOING TO BE EASY. SHE MUST HAVE EMBARKED ON HER JOURNEY WITH A GREAT DEAL OF HOPE, AND FAITH, IN FUTURE POSSIBILITIES, OF BEING ABLE TO

LIVE COMFORTABLY IN COMMUNITY WITH PEOPLE FROM CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS MUCH DIFFERENT FROM HER OWN.

TO SURVIVE, HOWEVER, GRANNY JUDY WORKED HARD TO BLEND IN TO THE SOCIETY OF HER DAY. TO PRACTISE ITS LANGUAGE, AND CUSTOMS, TO ACCEPT THAT FINDING HER WAY AS A YOUNG, FIRST NATIONS WOMAN, IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE LAST CENTURY MEANT LEARNING HOW TO IDENTIFY WITH THE COMMUNITY AROUND HER.

GRANNY JUDY DIED WHEN I WAS FIFTEEN, AND LIVING TWO PROVINCES AWAY FROM HER, AND I REGRET THAT I NEVER HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO TALK WITH HER ABOUT THOSE EARLY DAYS OF HER LIFE. WHAT MOTIVATED HER TO LEAVE THE RESERVE. HOW IT FELT, AND WHAT ABOUT HER CULTURE? HER IDENTITY AS AN ALGONKIAN? HOW DID SHE FEEL ABOUT LEAVING IT BEHIND? DID SHE FEEL SHE WAS LEAVING IT BEHIND?

I CAN SEE, I KNOW THAT SHE TOOK SOME STEPS TO ENSURE HER CHILDREN, WHILE EDUCATED TO BE ENTIRELY COMFORTABLE, IN CANADIAN SOCIETY, ALSO KNEW OF THEIR CONNECTION TO THE PIKWAKANAGAN COMMUNITY, AND THEIR FIRST NATION HERITAGE. MY DAD AND HIS BROTHERS SPENT TIME ON THE RESERVE IN THE SUMMER,

WITH THEIR GRANDFATHER, HIS SECOND WIFE, AND OTHER RELATIVES.
THEY HUNTED, THEY FISHED. THEY LIVED SIMPLY.

THEY HEARD THE OLD TONGUE, THOUGH THEY DIDN'T LEARN IT. MY
DAD REMEMBERS WORDS AND PHRASES, "O-CHOA," HIS UNCLE USED TO
SAY ALL THE TIME. "O-CHOA." THE YOUNG BOY LISTENED TO THE
STORIES OF HIS PEOPLE, IN ENGLISH, INTERSPERSED WITH THE OLD
ALGONKIAN DIALECT. THOUGH HE CAN'T TRANSLATE IT, I SENSE MY
DAD UNDERSTANDS WHAT "O-CHOA," MEANS. SOMETHING WAS
COMMUNICATED TO HIM IN THAT ALGONKIAN TONGUE.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: IDENTITY, OUR SENSE OF ETHNICITY, OUR
BACKGROUND, OUR SENSE OF WHERE WE CAME FROM, OUR HISTORICAL
MEMORY AS A PEOPLE.

FOR THE FIRST NATIONS, THE INUIT, AND THE METIS PEOPLES OF
CANADA, RECONCILIATION—IS VERY MUCH LINKED TO WANTING TO
RECOVER A SENSE OF IDENTIFY, OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE
NATIONS, THE FIRST NATIONS OF THIS LAND, A LAND MANY CALL,
TURTLE ISLAND.

THIS IS THE IDENTITY THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NEW NATION OF
CANADA SOUGHT TO ERADICATE AFTER 1867 IN THE FIRST DECADES OF

CONFEDERATION.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD IS IRREFUTABLE THAT THE SYSTEM OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS WAS SET UP, AS A SENIOR BUREAUCRAT FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SAID AROUND THE TIME MY GRANDMOTHER LEFT HER RESERVE, FOR THE PURPOSE OF TAKING THE INDIAN OUT OF THE INDIAN, FOR THE PURPOSE OF REMOVING ABORIGINAL IDENTITY FROM THE FUTURE OF CANADA.

IN 1994, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA MADE A CONFESSION TO GOD THAT “OUR CHURCH AGREED TO TAKE THE CHILDREN OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES FROM THEIR HOMES AND PLACE THEM IN [THESE] RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, [WHERE THEY] WERE DEPRIVED OF THEIR TRADITIONAL WAYS, WHICH [WAS] HELPFUL IN THE PROCESS OF ASSIMILATION.

“TO CARRY OUT THIS PROCESS, THE [CHURCH] USED DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES WHICH WERE FOREIGN TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, AND OPEN TO EXPLOITATION IN PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PUNISHMENT BEYOND ANY CHRISTIAN MAXIM OF CARE . . . “; AND,

“AS PART OF THIS POLICY, WE ENCOURAGED THE GOVERNMENT TO BAN SOME IMPORTANT PRACTICES THROUGH WHICH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES EXPERIENCED THE PRESENCE OF THE CREATOR GOD.”

“THE EFFECT OF ALL THIS, FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, WAS THE LOSS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE LOSS OF A SECURE SENSE OF SELF.”

IDENTITY AND SECURE SENSE OF SELF, LOST AS LANGUAGE AND CULTURE WERE TAKEN AWAY.

WHEN I REALIZED THAT I WOULD BE PREACHING TO YOU ON THIS SUNDAY, THIS PARTICULAR SUNDAY, JANUARY 25, 2009, AND REALIZED THAT I WOULD BE ADDRESSING A PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION, ON THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF ROBBIE BURNS, I WAS INITIALLY RATHER CHALLENGED BY THE THOUGHT OF SPEAKING TO YOU AND ABOUT OUR CALL TO PURSUE HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, ON THE DAY, WE PRESBYTERIANS, MANY OF US, INCLUDING MYSELF, ON MY MOTHER’S SIDE, WANT TO REMEMBER THAT WE ARE PROUD CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN OF SCOTS, AND SO FEEL TODAY, A SPECIAL DESIRE TO CELEBRATE THE GREAT ROBBIE BURNS.

AND I FELT ESPECIALLY CHALLENGED ABOUT SPEAKING TO YOU ON ROBBIE BURNS SUNDAY, AS I MUST CONFESS, I DON’T KNOW MUCH ABOUT BURNS. I CAN’T SPEAK WITH ANY PARTICULAR KNOWLEDGE OR AUTHORITY ABOUT HIS LIFE, OR HIS WORK. IT’S EMBARRASSING, FOR AS I AM THE GRANDDAUGHTER OF AN ALGONKIAN WOMAN, I AM ALSO THE

GRANDDAUGHTER OF JOCK FINLAY, A SCOT, WHO EMIGRATED TO CANADA AS A LITTLE BOY OF SIX.

AND THEN I REMEMBERED, WHAT I DO KNOW OF ROBBIE BURNS. WHAT I THINK EVERYONE WHO'S HEARD OF ROBBIE BURNS KNOWS ABOUT HIM, AND THAT IS THAT WE CELEBRATE ROBBIE BURNS BECAUSE HE WAS A MAN WHO SOUGHT TO CELEBRATE AND PRESERVE HIS SCOTTISH HERITAGE, HIS CELTIC LANGUAGE AND CULTURE.

ROBBIE BURNS IS A CULTURAL ICON FOR THE SCOTS. HE WROTE HIS POEMS AT A TIME WHEN ENGLISH CULTURE THREATENED TO OVERWHELM SCOTS CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY.

AND SO BURNS WROTE ABOUT HIS PEOPLE, AND HE WROTE IN THEIR LANGUAGE, TELLING THEIR STORIES, NARRATING THEIR HISTORY, THUS ENSURING THE MEMORY OF THE SCOTS WOULD LIVE ON.

I THINK, AS AN ABORIGINAL PERSON, THAT MY PEOPLE, THE FIRST NATIONS, GET ROBBIE BURNS IN A PROFOUND WAY. ABORIGINAL PEOPLES UNDERSTAND BURNS. FOR THEY SHARE WITH HIM A PASSION TO PRESERVE THEIR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, TO PRESERVE THEIR IDENTITY AS ALGONQUINS, IROQUOIS, CREE, SAULTEAUX, COAST SALISH,

HAIDA, DENE, INUVIALUIT, INUIT, INNU, METIS: PEOPLES OF AT LEAST 50 DIFFERENT INDIGENOUS NATIONS.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE CAN DEEPLY APPRECIATE ROBBIE BURNS IN ANOTHER WAY. FOR NOT ONLY WAS BURNS A CHAMPION OF SCOTS IDENTIFY: LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, HE WAS A STORYTELLER. HIS STORIES AND POEMS BECOME MOST ALIVE WHEN THEY ARE SPOKEN ALOUD.

I AM SURE THAT MOST PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD, WHEN THEY SING AULD LANG SYNE, HAVEN'T A CLUE WHAT THE WORDS MEAN. BUT THEY UNDERSTAND, WITHOUT NEED FOR ANY TRANSLATION, WHAT THE WORDS CONVEY. [NOR, I WOULD GUESS, DO MOST OF US, WHO SHARE A SCOTTISH HERITAGE, NOR DO WE UNDERSTAND THE SUBTLETIES OF THE ADDRESS TO THE HAGGIS. BUT WE STILL GET IT. WE KNOW IT VISCERALLY, IN OUR GUT, THE WORDS STIR OUR VERY SOULS. IT SPEAKS TO OUR OWN SENSE OF IDENTITY, OUR CULTURAL MEMORY AS A PEOPLE.

THE ORAL TRADITION OF LANGUAGE IS POWERFUL. BURNS KNEW THAT, AND WE CELEBRATE HIM FOR HELPING US REMEMBER THE POWER OF LANGUAGE, POETRY AND STORY, SPOKEN IN THE OLD TONGUE, LANGUAGE AND POETRY THAT SPEAKS TO A DEEP SENSE OF WHO WE ARE,

CONNECTING US WITH THE PAST, WITH OUR ANCESTORS, NARRATING, AS IT WERE, OUR IDENTITY, OUR STORY, OUR HISTORY.

ROBBIE BURNS WOULD GET THE NEED FOR RECONCILIATION. HE WOULD UNDERSTAND THE DEEP-SEATED DESIRES OF FIRST NATION, METIS AND INUIT IN PEOPLES IN CANADA TO PRESERVE THEIR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, THEIR ORAL TRADITIONS, AND STORIES, IN A SOCIETY WHERE ENGLISH AND A NORTH AMERICAN CULTURE HAVE BECOME DOMINANT.

I COME TO CARLETON PLACE THIS WEEKEND, FRESH FROM A TWO DAY CONFERENCE IN EDMONTON, WHICH WAS ORGANIZED BY KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, A POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTION WITH ITS ROOTS IN THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED TRADITION.

STORY TELLING FEATURED PROMINENTLY DURING THE CONFERENCE, WHOSE THEME WAS INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AND THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION.

KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE IS TO BE COMMENDED FOR HOLDING SUCH BI-ANNUAL INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCES ON TOPICS OF CURRENT NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE.

KING'S STRIVES TO HELP ITS STUDENTS CONNECT THEIR ACADEMIC STUDIES TO THE WORLD AROUND THEM, AND SO IT IS MANDATORY FOR STUDENTS TO ATTEND THESE CONFERENCES, FOR WHICH THEY OBTAIN ACADEMIC CREDIT.

MANDATORY OR NO, I HAVE TO ADMIRE THE KING'S STUDENTS, SOME 500 OF THEM, WHO ATTENDED THIS WEEK'S CONFERENCE, FOR SPENDING TWO FULL , SIX-HOUR DAYS, AND MANY, A THREE HOUR EVENING EVENT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CONFERENCE, LISTENING TO SPEAKER AFTER SPEAKER AFTER SPEAKER, FROM THE CHURCHES, FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, AND ABOVE ALL SPEAKERS FROM THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY, MANY OF THEM RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS – AS THEY CALL THEMSELVES. THE CONFERENCE WAS A FESTIVAL OF TALKING HEADS.

BY THE SECOND DAY, YOU HAD TO FEEL FOR THE STUDENTS . EVEN THOUGH THERE WERE BREAKOUT SESSIONS, THESE SESSIONS ALSO FEATURED SPEAKERS. THE NUMBER OF “TALKING HEADS,” WAS INCREDIBLE. AND MOST OF THE SPEAKERS WENT OVER THEIR ALLOTTED TIME. THE EMCEES HAD TO ADJUST THE SCHEDULE REPEATEDLY ON THE FINAL DAY, TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE WAS HEARD.

AT ONE POINT, I HAD TO GET UP TO INTRODUCE THE MODERATOR OF OUR GENERAL ASSEMBLY, THE REV. CHEOL SOON PARK. AND WHILE FEELING A NEED FOR BREVITY, I ALSO FOUND MYSELF STRUGGLING TO KEEP IT BRIEF, EVEN AFTER TWO DAYS OF SPEAKERS ON THE SAME TOPIC, I FELT I HAD A LOT TO SAY.

WHY WAS THAT? WHY DID SO MANY SPEAKERS ON THE SAME SUBJECT OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AND HEALING AND RECONCILIATION REPEATEDLY GO OVER THEIR ALLOTTED TIME?

I THINK IT'S BECAUSE RECONCILIATION IS ABOUT RECOVERING OUR IDENTITY. IT'S CONNECTED WITH OUR VERY SOULS AS PEOPLE. AND IT'S A UNIVERSAL NEED, A UNIVERSAL LONGING FOR ACCEPTANCE IN ALL OUR DIVERSITY, ACCEPTANCE, RESPECT, AND LOVE OF EACH OTHER'S DIFFERENT LANGUAGES AND CULTURES.

OUR MODERATOR, CHEOL SOON PARK, SPOKE TO THIS, THE ONLY FEATURED SPEAKER OF ASIAN DESCENT. HE SPOKE MOVINGLY AS A KOREAN-CANADIAN, OF KOREAN HISTORY, OF THE HISTORICAL STRUGGLES BETWEEN KOREANS AND THE JAPANESE, WHO ONCE SOUGHT TO COLONIZE KOREA, WHO FORCED KOREANS TO SPEAK THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE, TO EAT JAPANESE FOOD, AND TO BE SUBSERVIENT TO THEIR

JAPANESE OVERLORDS, INCLUDING AS SEXUAL SLAVES, THE “COMFORT WOMEN,” AS WE KNOW THEM TODAY.

RECONCILIATION IS A UNIVERSAL LONGING. AND A UNIVERSAL CALLING.

AS I SAT IN EDMONTON, CONTEMPLATING THE FACT OF ALL OF THESE SPEAKERS GETTING UP AND GETTING CAUGHT UP IN THE PASSION OF THE MOMENT, FINDING IT HARD TO STOP SPEAKING, A FEW IMAGES CAME TO MIND.

THE FIRST IMAGE WAS THAT OF THE LONG HOUSE. THE LONG HOUSE WAS CENTRAL TO THE IDENTITY OF IROQUOIS PEOPLES. THE LONG HOUSE IS A SACRED PLACE. IT IS LIKE A CHURCH. BUT IT HAS A UNIQUE IDENTITY OF ITS OWN, IN THE LIFE OF AN IROQUOIS COMMUNITY, AN IDENTITY WHICH CANNOT EASILY BE TRANSLATED INTO ANOTHER LANGUAGE.

PEOPLE GATHERED IN THE LONG HOUSE TO SPEAK. THE TRADITION WAS THAT ANYONE COULD SPEAK, AND ANYONE COULD SPEAK AS LONG AS THEY NEEDED TO. AND EVERYONE COULD SPEAK. THERE WAS NO TIME LIMIT PUT ON THE PROCEEDINGS IN THE LONG HOUSE. IROQUOIS SOCIETY VALUED THE RIGHT OF EACH INDIVIDUAL TO SPEAK, FOR AS LONG AS THE SPIRIT MOVED THEM.

THE OTHER IMAGE THAT CAME TO MIND, AN IMAGE THAT BEGINS WITH A PHRASE, REALLY, A PHRASE THAT HAS PROFOUND SIGNIFICANCE AND MEANING IN OUR CHRISTIAN TRADITION WAS THE IMAGE OF THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

MOST EVERY SUNDAY IN OUR CHURCHES WE SAY WE BELIEVE IN THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

WHAT IS THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS? THIS COMMUNION THAT WE BELIEVE IN?

WHEN I GOT UP TO ADDRESS THOSE ATTENDING THE CONFERENCE IN EDMONTON, I LOOKED OUT ON A SEA OF FACES, STUDENTS FROM KING'S AND THEIR INVITED GUESTS, AMONG THEM STUDENTS FROM BLUE QUILLS COLLEGE, AN ABORIGINALLY-RUN POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTION, BUILT ON THE SITE OF A FORMER RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL.

I LOOKED OUT ALSO AT COLLEAGUES AND LEADERS FROM MANY PROTESTANT CHURCHES, AND FROM THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. LEADERS AS WELL FROM MANY FIRST NATION AND METIS COMMUNITIES, FROM MANY INDIGENOUS NATIONS ACROSS CANADA.

I LOOKED OUT AT THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS. AND WHEN I SAT DOWN, I LISTENED AS THE SAINTS SPOKE TO ONE AND ANOTHER, TAKING AS MUCH TIME AS THEY NEEDED, SPEAKING FROM THEIR HEARTS, AND OFTEN SHARING MESSAGES IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGES.

OUR MODERATOR GAVE AN EXAMPLE: PYUNG-WHA, HE TOLD US IS THE KOREAN WORD FOR PEACE: PYUNG-WHA, AS IT HAPPENS, IS ALSO THE MANDARIN WORD, FOR PEACE: PYUNG-WHA. IT MEANS HARMONIOUS BALANCE.

OUR GOSPEL LESSON THIS MORNING PRESENTS US WITH THE IMAGE AND THE STORY OF HOW JESUS CAME TO GALILEE, PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD, AND SAYING THE TIME IS FULFILLED, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS COME NEAR; REPENT, AND BELIEVE IN THE GOOD NEWS.

WE KNOW THAT REPENTANCE MEANS TURNING AWAY FROM THE OLD, TURNING AWAY FROM SIN, TURNING TOWARDS A NEW LIFE IN JESUS CHRIST.

OUR LESSON REMINDS US HOW PASSING BY THE SEA OF GALILEE, CHRIST SAW SIMON, AND HIS BROTHER ANDREW AND A LITTLE FURTHER ON HE SAW JAMES AND HIS BROTHER JOHN. THESE WERE FISHERMEN. HE CALLED TO THEM, AND THEY FOLLOWED.

WE REMEMBER SIMON PETER, ANDREW, JAMES AND JOHN AS CHRIST'S DISCIPLES. BUT WE ALSO REMEMBER THEM AS FISHERMEN. THEIR IDENTITY HAS BEEN PRESERVED THROUGH THE AGES. THEY ARE CHRISTIANS AND THEY ARE FISHERMEN. WE CONTINUE TO CELEBRATE THEM AS FISHERMEN, AS WE CELEBRATE THEM AS CHRIST'S DISCIPLES. WE CELEBRATE THEM AS GALILEANS. WE CELEBRATE THEIR IDENTITY.

CHRIST SAID, BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO STRIVE FOR PEACE, WHO STRIVE FOR HARMONIOUS BALANCE AMONG ALL PEOPLES. THE LOVE OF CHRIST URGES US TO BE CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS, HIS MINISTERS OF RECONCILIATION.

WE ARE CALLED TO LISTEN TO EACH OTHER, AND TO LOVE EACH OTHER AS CHRIST LOVED US. THIS IS WHAT HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IS ALL ABOUT.

SO I INVITE YOU TO SEEK OPPORTUNITIES TO LISTEN TO FIRST NATION, METIS AND INUIT PEOPLES TELL THEIR STORIES, LISTEN TO THEIR LANGUAGES, LET THEM SHARE THEIR CULTURES WITH YOU, LOVE THEM WITH ALL YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS AND BEINGS. FOLLOW THE WORK OF THE CANADA'S TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION. THE COMMISSION WILL HELP US REMEMBER AND RECOVER THE STORIES OF

ABORIGINAL BROTHERS AND SISTERS, ENSURING THEIR LANGUAGE,
CULTURE AND HERITAGE ARE RECOVERED AND CELEBRATED, IN
CANADA, THROUGH TIME IMMEMORIAL.

I DARE TO THINK THAT ROBBIE BURNS WOULD BE PROUD OF US, WOULD
ADMIRE WHAT THE DESCENDANTS OF THE SCOTS PEOPLE, NOW LIVING IN
CANADA, WITH A HOST OF PEOPLES FROM OTHER LANDS, WANT TO DO IN
THIS LAND IN THIS CENTURY.

HE WOULD ADMIRE OUR DESIRE TO SUPPORT ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AS
THEY RECOVER THEIR ANCIENT IDENTITIES, AND TO FULFILL THE
PROMISE WE MADE TO THEM IN OUR CONFESSION OF 1994 TO WALK
TOGETHER TO FIND HEALING AND WHOLENESS AS ALL GOD'S PEOPLES,
AS THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

I BELIEVE IN THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

O BLESSED COMMUNION, FELLOWSHIP DIVINE. WE FEEBLY STRUGGLE.
THEY IN GLORY SHINE. YET ALL ARE ON IN THEE, FOR ALL ARE THINE.

FROM EARTH'S WIDE BOUNDS, FROM OCEAN'S FARTHEST COAST,
THROUGH GATES OF PEARL STREAMS IN THE COUNTLESS HOST, SINGING
TO FATHER, SON, AND HOLY GHOST. HALLELUJAH! HALLELUJAH!!"
AMEN.

2 Cor. 5:14-21
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16
1 Peter 2:2-10
John 14:15-21

RECONCILING, BRICK BY BRICK

LET US PRAY:

O SPIRIT, GRANT THAT WE MAY NEVER SEEK SO MUCH TO BE CONSOLED,
AS TO CONSOLE, TO BE UNDERSTOOD, AS TO UNDERSTAND, TO BE LOVED,
AS TO LOVE WITH ALL OUR HEARTS AND MINDS AND SPIRITS.

AND MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH, AND THE MEDIATIONS OF ALL OF
OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE TO YOU, OH GOD, OUR STRENGTH, OUR
ROCK, AND OUR REDEEMER. AMEN.

GOOD MORNING. THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR INVITING ME TO WORSHIP
WITH YOU TODAY, HERE AT ST. ANDREW'S, ON THIS MISSION AWARENESS
SUNDAY.

AND, HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!! WOW, YOU'RE LOOKING AWFULLY YOUNG FOR
175 YEARS.

I CAN ONLY HOPE, I LOOK AS GOOD AT 75 YEARS OF AGE!

IT IS SO GOOD TO HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT WITH YOU, THIS MORNING, ON THE MINISTRY OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE—AN IMPORTANT AND A CHALLENGING TOPIC.

AS AN ABORIGINAL PERSON MYSELF, IT IS AN IMPORTANT CUSTOM, FOR ME TO BEGIN BY ACKNOWLEDGING THAT WE ARE WORSHIPPING IN THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF MY ANISHINABE COUSINS, MISSISSAUGA AND OJIBWAY PEOPLES. I BELIEVE THE CLOSEST FIRST NATION COMMUNITY IS ALDERVILLE, ABOUT 30 KILOMETRES NORTH OF HERE. AND THEN THERE'S HIAWATHA, ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF RICE LAKE, CLOSER TO PETERBOROUGH.

THIS MORNING I WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU THAT I COLLECT ROCKS.
YES, ROCKS.

IN FACT I KEEP A PILE OF THEM IN MY OFFICE AT 50 WYNFORD DRIVE, AS I HAVE KEPT ROCKS IN EVERY OFFICE THAT I'VE WORKED IN PREVIOUSLY.

YOU'LL BE PLEASED TO HEAR THAT I DON'T KEEP THESE ROCKS IN ORDER TO HAVE SOMETHING HANDY TO THROW AT PEOPLE WHO ANNOY ME.

AND WHILE, THEY DO COME IN HANDY AS PAPER WEIGHTS, I KEEP THEM FOR NO PARTICULAR PURPOSE AT ALL. I KEEP THEM, SIMPLY, BECAUSE I

LIKE THEM. I LIKE ROCKS. THEY ARE PRETTY. THEY ARE FASCINATING: THEIR SHAPES, THEIR COLOURS, THEIR SIZES, THEIR TEXTURES. THEY'RE ALL SO DIFFERENT. SO INTERESTING. SO UNUSUAL. I JUST LIKE ROCKS.

YOU MAY ALREADY BE REMEMBERING THAT ROCKS, OR STONES, FEATURED IN THIS MORNING'S READINGS.

IN OUR PSALM, GOD IS COMPARED TO A ROCK: A ROCK OF REFUGE, A STRONG FORTRESS. GOD IS SOLID, ROCK SOLID, EVER-LASTING, ENDURING OVER EONS OF TIME, AS ROCKS ENDURE, GO ON "LIVING," OVER EONS OF TIME.

IN OUR READING FROM PETER, CHRIST IS THE ROCK, THE ROCK, THE CORNERSTONE, CHOSEN AND PRECIOUS. HE IS THE VERY HEAD OF THE CORNER, THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH.

AND HERE, IN THIS PASSAGE, WE TOO ARE CALLED ROCKS, OR, AS IN OUR TRANSLATION THIS MORNING, "STONES." WE ARE INVITED TO COME TO THE LORD, AS LIVING STONES, LIVING ROCKS, CHOSEN AND PRECIOUS IN GOD'S SIGHT. WE ARE INVITED TO BE LIVING STONES, TO OFFER SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES ACCEPTABLE TO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, AND TO ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE THE LIVING STONES BUILT INTO A SPIRITUAL HOUSE.

I REMEMBER ONE DAY, I WAS SITTING IN MY OFFICE, BACK WHEN I WORKED AT INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS. AND A MAN ARRIVED TO MEET WITH ME. HE WAS OJIBWAY, FROM NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO. AND HE WAS A TRADITIONALIST. BY THAT, I MEAN HE WAS A DEEPLY SPIRITUAL MAN, WHO PRACTISED TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL WAYS.

HE CAME IN. SAW MY ROCK COLLECTION. AND IMMEDIATELY HE WAS TRANSFORMED. IN THE VERNACULAR, MY ROCK COLLECTION “FREAKED HIM OUT.” HE DID A DOUBLE TAKE WHEN HE SAW THEM. HE KEPT LOOKING AT THEM, AS WE TALKED.

HE WOULD LOOK BACK AT THEM OVER HIS SHOULDER. HE WENT OVER TO LOOK AT THEM. AND FINALLY HE SAID, LOOKING TRANSFIXED AT MY PILE OF ROCKS, “THIS IS REALLY POWERFUL MEDICINE.” THERE’S A LOT OF STRENGTH HERE. THIS IS REALLY GOOD, REALLY POWERFUL.

I KNEW WHAT HE MEANT. ABORIGINAL PEOPLE PRACTICE A CREATION-CENTRED SPIRITUALITY. THEY SPEAK OF THEIR CONNECTIONS TO EVERYTHING IN GOD’S CREATION. THEY SPEAK OF THEIR RELATIONSHIPS TO EVERYTHING ON EARTH, NOT JUST TO WHAT WE MIGHT CALL OTHER LIVING BEINGS, THE ANIMALS, THE PLANTS, BIRDS, FISH, INSECTS,

ETCETERA. FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, ROCKS HAVE SPIRITS, STONES HAVE SPIRITS, GRAINS OF SAND HAVE SPIRITS. THEY ARE ALIVE.

THEY ARE LIVING STONES. THEY HAVE A MEANING, AND A PLACE, AND A FUNCTION IN CREATION. ROCKS, STONES ARE NOT ONLY TO BE THOUGHT OF AS GIFTS FOR THE USE OF HUMAN BEINGS, THEY ARE TO BE THOUGHT OF AS LIVING BEINGS WHO SHOULD BE RESPECTED FOR WHAT THEY GIVE, AND WHAT THEY DO, FOR OTHER LIVING BEINGS.

FOR EXAMPLE, THEY ARE TO BE THANKED FOR ALLOWING THEMSELVES TO BE USED AS CORNER STONES, FOR BEING USED TO BUILD SPIRITUAL HOUSES, TO BUILD REFUGES, TO BUILD FORTRESSES. THEY ARE TO BE THANKED FOR BEING USED TO BUILD GOD'S CHURCHES, LIKE THE ROCKS, THE STONES THAT BUILT THIS CHURCH, 70 YEARS AGO.

IN ABORIGINAL TRADITION, ROCKS ARE ALSO USED IN CEREMONY. ROCKS ARE CALLED GRANDFATHERS. HOW SOLID, ROCK SOLID, AN IMAGE IS THAT: A GRANDFATHER? IN A SWEAT LODGE, THE ROCKS, THE GRANDFATHERS, ARE HEATED ON A FIRE, AND BROUGHT INTO THE LODGE TO PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE LITURGY OF THE LODGE.

IN THE SWEAT LODGE, MEDICINES, TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL MEDICINES, SUCH AS SWEETGRASS, SAGE, CEDAR, AND TOBACCO ARE

BURNED ON THE ROCKS, AS THE PEOPLE LIFT PRAYERS UP TO THE
CREATOR.

ROCKS HAVE A FUNCTION IN CREATION, AN IMPORTANT FUNCTION.

AND HERE, THIS MORNING, WE READ IN OUR OWN SPIRITUAL TRADITION,
ABOUT HOW WE ARE METAPHORICALLY INVITED TO BE LIKE LIVING
ROCKS, TO BE LIKE LIVING STONES.

AND AS EACH ROCK, EACH STONE, HAS A PLACE, A FUNCTION IN
CREATION, SO WE HAVE A PLACE, AND A FUNCTION, IN THE BUILDING
THAT IS GOD'S KINGDOM.

RECENTLY I READ A PAPER FROM THE BRANCH OF THE GOVERNMENT
WHICH IS PUTTING TOGETHER PLANS FOR CANADA'S TRUTH AND
RECONCILIATION COMMISSION. THIS IS THE COMMISSION THAT WILL
SOON BE LAUNCHED TO HELP THE COUNTRY EXAMINE THE LEGACY OF
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, AND HELP US, AS A NATION, TO FIGURE OUT HOW
TO MOVE FORWARD TO BRING ABOUT NEW AND HEALTHIER
RELATIONSHIPS AMONG ALL PEOPLE IN CANADA.

I WAS PRIVILEGED, IN MARCH, TO TOUR THE COUNTRY WITH THE
MODERATOR OF OUR CHURCH, HANS KOUWENBERG, ALONG WITH

LEADERS FROM THE ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS, AND OTHER NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ABORIGINAL ORGANIZATIONS, AS WELL AS OTHER CHURCH LEADERS, INCLUDING THE PRIMATE OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH, THE MODERATOR OF THE UNITED CHURCH, AND SEVERAL ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS.

OUR PURPOSE WAS TO TALK ABOUT THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION TO CANADIANS AT LARGE, ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE. AND TO START TO IMAGINE, AT A NUMBER OF PUBLIC EVENTS, HOW WE CAN WORK TOGETHER AS THE PEOPLE OF CANADA, TO BRING ABOUT A NEW CREATION, TO BUILD A NEW RECONCILED KINGDOM, TOGETHER.

THE PAPER I READ FROM THE GOVERNMENT, REPORTED ON A GET TOGETHER OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CHURCHES, AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, INCLUDING MANY SURVIVORS OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS. AND I WAS STRUCK BY AN OBSERVATION IN THE REPORT THAT THE TRUTH WHICH THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION WILL WORK TO REVEAL, THE TRUTH WILL HAVE TO BE BUILT “BRICK BY BRICK.”

THE REPORT STATED, “THE TRUTH HAS TO BE BUILT BRICK BY BRICK, AS RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS TELL THEIR STORIES, AS GOVERNMENT

OFFICIALS TELL THEIR STORIES, AND AS CHURCH OFFICIALS TELL THEIR STORIES.”

BRICK BY BRICK. STONE BY STONE. LIVING STONE BY LIVING STONE. EACH PERSON WILL NEED TO TELL THEIR STORY TO BUILD A COMPLETE PICTURE OF THE TRUTH. NO ONE KNOWS THE WHOLE STORY. NOT ONE SINGLE GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL. ALL THE STORIES ARE IMPORTANT. ALL THE BRICKS, ALL THE BUILDING BLOCKS ARE IMPORTANT. EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN WRITING THE HISTORY.

GOING FURTHER, WE CAN DISCERN THAT EVERYONE ALSO HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN BUILDING THE FUTURE, IN MOVING FORWARD. EVERYONE OF US, EACH LIVING STONE, HAS A PART TO PLAY IN BUILDING A RECONCILED PEOPLE, A RECONCILED NATION.

BACK IN FEBRUARY, OUR FRIENDS IN AUSTRALIA MADE NEWS INTERNATIONALLY WHEN THE NEW GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA APOLOGIZED TO THE ABORIGINES AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS, THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THAT COUNTRY.

AFTER ACKNOWLEDGING THE SINS OF THE PAST, THEIR PRIME MINISTER, KEVIN RUDD, MADE SOME IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS ABOUT WHAT THE APOLOGY MEANS FOR THE COUNTRY.

HE TALKED ABOUT THE APOLOGY AS BEING “THE FIRST STEP” TOWARDS “A FUTURE WHERE ALL AUSTRALIANS, WHATEVER THEIR ORIGINS, ARE TRULY EQUAL PARTNERS, WITH EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND WITH AN EQUAL STAKE IN SHAPING THE NEXT CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF THE COUNTRY. . . A FUTURE BASED ON MUTUAL RESPECT, MUTUAL RESOLVE, AND MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY.”

WE NOTE THE EMPHASIS ON EVERYONE, ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE COUNTRY, ALL HAVING MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FUTURE.

THE AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER CONCLUDED ON AN INSPIRING, AND WE’D HAVE TO SAY, A BIBLICAL THEME, INVITING HIS PEOPLE TO “LET . . . THIS NATIONAL DAY OF RECONCILIATION . . . BECOME ONE OF THOSE RARE MOMENTS IN WHICH WE MIGHT JUST TRANSFORM THE WAY IN WHICH THE NATION THINKS ABOUT ITSELF” . . . FINALLY REMARKING THAT “RECONCILIATION . . . OPENS UP WHOLE NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FUTURE.”

THIS IS AN INSPIRING VISION. THIS IS THE POINT AT WHICH WE IN CANADA ALSO FIND OURSELVES TODAY, AS WE AWAIT A PROMISED NATIONAL APOLOGY FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, AND THE LAUNCH OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION.

WE ALSO READ THIS MORNING THAT “IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST, THERE IS A NEW CREATION. EVERYTHING OLD HAS PASSED AWAY; SEE EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW! ALL THIS IS FROM GOD WHO RECONCILED US TO HIMSELF THROUGH CHRIST, AND HAS GIVEN US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION . . . ENTRUSTING THE MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION TO US.”

WOW!

GOD HAS ENTRUSTED US WITH THE MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION. GOD TRUST US TO GET IT RIGHT. WE ARE TO BE CHRIST’S AMBASSADORS, AND IN CHRIST, WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD. A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION.

THIS IS OUR TASK, AS CHRISTIANS: TO BE AMBASSADORS, CHRIST’S AMBASSADORS, MINISTERS OF RECONCILIATION.

I THINK IT’S A CALL TO CELEBRATE. AND WHEN WE THINK ABOUT THE IMAGE OF BEING LIVING STONES, WHO TOGETHER, BUILD THE NEW CREATION, AS PEOPLE, WHO ONE BY ONE, BRICK BY BRICK, DO OUR INDIVIDUAL PARTS TO BRING ABOUT A NEW NATION, A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, THE TASK DOESN’T SEEM

THAT DAUNTING, DOES IT? WE EACH HAVE A ROLE. AND EVERYONE HAS A ROLE. NO ONE INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP HAS TO SHOULDER THE WHOLE BURDEN OF RECONCILIATION ALONE. WE EACH HAVE A PART, TOGETHER.

IN 1994, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA WITNESSED THAT “THE HOLY SPIRIT, SPEAKING IN AND THROUGH SCRIPTURE CALLS [US] TO CONFESSION.” THIS WAS OUR CONFESSION TO GOD, AND TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, WITH RESPECT TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS.

WE DECLARED THAT “WE [THE CHURCH] UNDERSTAND OUR MISSION AND MINISTRY IN NEW WAYS IN PART BECAUSE OF THE TESTIMONY OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE”– HERE ACKNOWLEDGING, THAT GOD’S SPIRIT SPEAKS THROUGH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, IN WHOM WE ALSO SEE THE FACE OF CHRIST.

WE EXPRESSED OUR “REGRET [THAT] THERE ARE THOSE [WITHIN THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY] WHOSE LIVES HAVE BEEN DEEPLY SCARRED BY THE EFFECTS OF THE MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE” CHURCH. WE PRAYED THAT “GOD WILL GUIDE US IN COMPASSIONATE WAYS TOWARDS HELPING [ABORIGINAL PEOPLE] TO HEAL . . . AND [WE PROMISED] TO WALK WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO FIND HEALING AND WHOLENESS TOGETHER AS GOD’S PEOPLE.”

WE IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HAVE ALREADY TAKEN THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD RECONCILIATION. WE HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED THE SINS OF OUR PAST, AND WE HAVE PROCLAIMED, TO GOD, OUR DESIRE FOR RECONCILIATION, AND PROMISED ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, TO WALK WITH THEM, TOWARDS HEALING AND WHOLENESS.

WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE? BRICK BY BRICK? WHAT ARE THE STEPS?

THE WORD OF GOD, THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS CHRIST, I THINK SHOWS US THAT THE BASIC STEPS IN RECONCILING WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ARE SIMPLE. I TRULY BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE SIMPLE. WE NEED ONLY REFLECT, AGAIN, ON CHRIST'S EXAMPLE. HE DARED TO INVITE THOSE WHO WERE IGNORED AND EXCLUDED BY OTHERS TO BE WITH HIM, TO TALK TO HIM, TO GET TO KNOW HIM, TO BREAK BREAD WITH HIM. I THINK THAT'S HOW WE START.

BRICK BY BRICK. INDIVIDUAL BY INDIVIDUAL. WE GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER.

SO LOCALLY, HERE IN COBOURG, I INVITE YOU TO TAKE PART IN THE MISSION AND MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION. YOU HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY. AN IMPORTANT ROLE. EVERYONE DOES. EVERY STONE IS NEEDED.

AND EACH CONTRIBUTION IS VALUABLE, NO MATTER WHAT THE SIZE, OR THE SHAPE, OR THE NATURE OF THE CONTRIBUTION.

I ENCOURAGE YOU TO BE LIVING STONES WHO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS, WHO FIND WAYS TO REACH OUT AND GET TO KNOW YOUR ABORIGINAL NEIGHBOURS.

WE KNOW, AS CHRISTIANS, THAT CULTURAL AND SPORTING EVENTS, TIMES OF FELLOWSHIP, OFTEN PROVIDE THE BEST SETTINGS IN WHICH TO MAKE NEW FRIENDSHIPS. HAVE A MEAL TOGETHER. SHARE TIME TOGETHER. HAVE FUN!

TAKE A GROUP TO ALDERVILLE'S POW WOW ON THE THIRD WEEKEND IN JULY. VISIT THEIR OJIBWAY VILLAGE. ATTEND A DRUM SOCIAL. FIND OUT WHAT A DRUM SOCIAL IS. TOUR THE HISTORIC SERPENT MOUNDS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE AT HIAWATHA ON RICE LAKE.

INVITE AN ABORIGINAL SPIRITUAL LEADER, AN ELDER, OR PERHAPS AN ACADEMIC FROM THE OUTSTANDING NATIVE STUDIES PROGRAM AT TRENT UNIVERSITY TO SPEAK TO YOU.

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO MAKE CONNECTIONS.

I SUGGEST THE PROCESS OF BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE HAS POTENTIAL FAR BEYOND THAT OF GETTING A BETTER APPRECIATION FOR EACH OTHER, OF LEARNING NEW THINGS ABOUT OUR HISTORY, AND DISCOVERING COMMON TEACHINGS FROM OF OUR DIFFERENT SPIRITUAL PRACTICES, LEARNING FROM HOW WE EACH EXPERIENCE THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF THE CREATOR IN OUR WORSHIP CEREMONIES.

I'M CONVINCED, THAT IN THE SEEMINGLY SIMPLE PROCESS OF TALKING WITH EACH OTHER, AND LISTENING TO EACH OTHER, THE LONGER WE SPEND TIME LISTENING, ESPECIALLY, WE COLLECTIVELY – ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE -- WILL START TO GAIN NEW INSIGHTS INTO WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO ADDRESS THE ONGOING ISSUES IN OUR RELATIONSHIP. THE CHALLENGING ISSUES. THE ISSUES THAT BOTHER US. THE PROBLEMS THAT JUST DON'T SEEM TO GO AWAY.

NEW INSIGHTS ARE NEEDED. NEW PARTNERSHIPS IN COMMUNITY BUILDING NEED TO BE FORGED. NEW VOICES ARE REQUIRED. VOICES OF ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL FRIENDS. VOICES OF NEIGHBOURS. VOICES, WHO REMEMBER THE VOICE OF CHRIST, WHO SPOKE FOR THOSE WHO OTHERS IGNORED.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO THE LAUNCH OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION. YOU ALSO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION BY FOLLOWING ITS WORK. LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO LISTEN TO THE STORIES, THE STORIES OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS, THE STORIES OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, THE STORIES OF THE CHURCHES, AS THE TRUTH IS REVEALED, BRICK BY BRICK, LIVING STONE BY LIVING STONE. AND THINK ABOUT HOW WE, AS CHRIST'S LIVING STONES, CAN PLAY OUR PART TO TRANSFORM HOW OUR NATION THINKS ABOUT ITSELF.

THERE IS A NEW CREATION. EVERYTHING OLD HAS PASSED AWAY, EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW. THIS CAN BE A TIME OF RENAISSANCE. WE CRAVE A RENAISSANCE IN OUR CHURCHES TODAY.

AND SO ON THIS MISSION AWARENESS SUNDAY, LET US TAKE NOTE THAT GOD HAS GIVEN US A MISSION: GOD HAS GIVEN US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION. AND GOD CALLS EACH AND EVERYONE OF US, TO BE A RECONCILER, TO BE A MINISTER OF RECONCILIATION. WE ALL HAVE A PART TO PLAY, AS THE LIVING STONES OF GOD'S CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST. LET US REJOICE AND BE GLAD IN OUR CALLING!

WHATEVER IS TRUE, WHATEVER IS HONOURABLE, WHATEVER IS JUST, WHATEVER IS PURE, WHATEVER IS PLEASING, WHATEVER IS

COMMENDABLE, IF THERE IS ANY EXCELLENCE AND IF THERE IS
ANYTHING WORTHY OF PRAISE, LET US THINK ABOUT THESE THINGS.

AMEN.

1 Samuel 17:1a, 38-49

Psalms 9:9-20

2 Cor. 5:14-21

Mark 4:35-41

RECONCILING WITH GOLIATH?

LET US PRAY TOGETHER:

O SPIRIT, GRANT THAT WE MAY NEVER SEEK SO MUCH TO BE CONSOLED, AS TO CONSOLE, TO BE UNDERSTOOD, AS TO UNDERSTAND, TO BE LOVED, AS TO LOVE WITH ALL OUR HEARTS, OUR MINDS AND OUR SPIRITS.

AND MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH, AND THE MEDIATIONS OF ALL OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE TO YOU, OH GOD, OUR STRENGTH, OUR ROCK, AND OUR REDEEMER. AMEN.

GOOD MORNING. AS YOU MIGHT IMAGINE IT IS BOTH A GREAT DELIGHT AND, A BIT DAUNTING, TO BE HERE TO PREACH TO MY FAMILY, MY HOME CONGREGATION, ABOUT THE SUBJECT OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

AS MANY OF YOU KNOW, I AM AN ABORIGINAL PERSON, MYSELF. I AM A MEMBER OF THE ALGONQUINS OF PIKWAKANAGAN, OR GOLDEN LAKE, WHICH IS LOCATED ABOUT 150 KILOMETRES NORTHWEST OF OTTAWA.

AS IS CUSTOMARY AMONG ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT I ACKNOWLEDGE WITH THANKS, OUR OPPORTUNITY TO WORSHIP HERE IN THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF MY ANISHINABE COUSINS, THE MISSISSAUGAS, MEMBERS OF THE THREE FIRES CONFEDERACY, WHO HAVE LIVED IN THIS AREA FOR MANY CENTURIES.

TODAY IS ABORIGINAL DAY SUNDAY, A DAY OUR CHURCH, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IS CANADA, HAS SET ASIDE TO HONOUR THE FIRST PEOPLES OF OUR COUNTRY. IT IS A DAY TO REFLECT WITH GRATITUDE TO GOD, THE CREATOR, THE GREAT SPIRIT, ON THE GIFTS OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

TODAY IS ALSO FATHER'S DAY. IT IS FROM MY FATHER THAT I DERIVE MY ALONGKIAN HERITAGE, AND SO FITTING, AS I BEGIN THIS MORNING, THAT I TELL YOU SOMETHING ABOUT MY DAD.

MY DAD'S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE ALWAYS HAS BEEN HIS GREATEST GIFT TO ME. I KNOW HE WOULD STAND UP TO ANY GOLIATH WHO THREATENED MY BROTHERS OF ME, AND I SUSPECT DAD'S HIGHLY PROTECTIVE INSTINCTS COME FROM HIS MOTHER, MY GRANDMOTHER JUDY.

I OFTEN THINK NOW WHAT A REMARKABLE WOMAN MY ALGONQUIN GRANDMOTHER, JUDY RANSOM, MUST HAVE BEEN. WHAT A TREMENDOUS

SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE SHE MUST HAVE HAD, WHAT A SENSE OF HOPE AND OPTIMISM MUST HAVE DRIVEN HER TO MAKE A DECISION, A RISKY DECISION, A VERY UNUSUAL DECISION IN ITS DAY, WHEN AS A VERY YOUNG WOMAN, GRANNY JUDY DECIDED TO LEAVE HER COMMUNITY OF PIKWAKANAGAN, IN THE 1920S, TO SEEK OUT A NEW LIFE FIRST IN TORONTO, AND SOON AFTER IN OTTAWA, WHERE SHE HAD HER FAMILY AND LIVED OUT HER LIFE.

HER STORY IS REMARKABLE FOR IT CANNOT HAVE BEEN EASY FOR A YOUNG, SINGLE WOMAN, AN ABORIGINAL WOMAN, TO LEAVE HER FAMILY AND HER COMMUNITY TO SEEK OUT A NEW LIFE IN THE BIG CITY, IN CANADA, IN THE 1920s.

AS AN ABORIGINAL WOMAN, SHE COULD NOT HAVE EXPECTED THE GOING TO BE EASY. SHE MUST HAVE EMBARKED ON HER JOURNEY WITH A GREAT DEAL OF HOPE, AND FAITH, IN FUTURE POSSIBILITIES, OF BEING ABLE TO LIVE COMFORTABLY IN COMMUNITY WITH PEOPLE FROM CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS MUCH DIFFERENT FROM HER OWN.

HOWEVER, TO SURVIVE, I KNOW THAT GRANNY JUDY WORKED HARD TO BLEND IN TO THE SOCIETY OF HER DAY. TO PRACTISE ITS LANGUAGE, AND CUSTOMS, TO ACCEPT THAT FINDING HER WAY AS A YOUNG, FIRST NATIONS WOMAN, IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE LAST CENTURY MEANT CONCEALING SOMETHING OF WHO SHE WAS.

AS MY DAD SAID, GROWING UP IN OTTAWA MEANT, “YOU DIDN’T GO AROUND TELLING PEOPLE YOU WERE AN INDIAN.” BLENDING IN WAS IMPERATIVE. RACISM WAS PALPABLE IN THOSE DAYS, AND DIRECTLY EXPERIENCED BY MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY.

GRANNY JUDY DIED WHEN I WAS FIFTEEN, AND LIVING TWO PROVINCES AWAY FROM HER, AND I REGRET THAT I NEVER HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO TALK WITH HER ABOUT THOSE EARLY DAYS OF HER LIFE. WHAT MOTIVATED HER TO LEAVE HER HOME COMMUNITY ON RESERVE. HOW DID IT FEEL TO HAVE TO BLEND IN, TO SURVIVE IN THE CITY OF OTTAWA. WHAT OF HER CULTURE? HER IDENTITY AS AN ALGONKIAN? HOW DID SHE FEEL ABOUT LEAVING IT BEHIND? DID SHE FEEL SHE WAS LEAVING IT BEHIND?

I CAN SEE, I KNOW THAT SHE TOOK SOME STEPS TO ENSURE HER CHILDREN, WHILE EDUCATED TO BE ENTIRELY COMFORTABLE, IN CANADIAN SOCIETY, ALSO KNEW OF THEIR CONNECTION TO THE PIKWAKANAGAN COMMUNITY, AND THEIR FIRST NATION HERITAGE.

MY DAD AND HIS BROTHERS SPENT TIME ON THE RESERVE IN THE SUMMER, WITH THEIR GRANDFATHER, HIS SECOND WIFE, AND OTHER RELATIVES. THEY HUNTED, THEY FISHED. THEY LIVED SIMPLY.

ON THE PIKWAKANAGAN RESERVED, MY DAD WOULD HAVE HEARD THE OLD TONGUE, THOUGH HE DIDN'T LEARN IT. MY DAD DOES REMEMBER A FEW WORDS AND PHRASES. HE IS FOND OF "O-CHOA," WHICH HIS UNCLE USED TO SAY ALL THE TIME. "O-CHOA."

AS A YOUNG BOY MY DAD LISTENED TO THE STORIES OF HIS PEOPLE, IN ENGLISH, INTERSPERSED WITH THE OLD ALGONKIAN DIALECT. THOUGH HE CAN'T TRANSLATE IT, I SENSE MY DAD UNDERSTANDS WHAT "O-CHOA," MEANS. SOMETHING WAS COMMUNICATED TO HIM IN THAT ALGONKIAN TONGUE.

SOMETHING THAT DEEPLY CONNECTED TO HIS IDENTITY . . . LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: OUR SENSE OF ETHNICITY, OUR BACKGROUND, OUR SENSE OF WHERE WE CAME FROM, OUR HISTORICAL MEMORY AS A PEOPLE.

FOR THE FIRST NATIONS, THE INUIT, AND THE METIS PEOPLES OF CANADA, RECONCILIATION—IS VERY MUCH LINKED TO WANTING TO RECOVER A SENSE OF IDENTIFY, OF THEIR COLLECTIVE MEMORY AS NATIONS, THE FIRST NATIONS OF THIS LAND, A LAND MANY CALL, TURTLE ISLAND.

THIS IS THE IDENTITY THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NEW NATION OF CANADA SOUGHT TO ERADICATE AFTER 1867 IN THE FIRST DECADES OF CONFEDERATION.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD IS IRREFUTABLE THAT THE SYSTEM OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS WAS SET UP, AS A SENIOR BUREAUCRAT FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SAID, AROUND THE TIME MY GRANDMOTHER LEFT HER RESERVE, FOR THE PURPOSE OF TAKING THE INDIAN OUT OF THE INDIAN, FOR THE PURPOSE OF REMOVING ABORIGINAL IDENTITY FROM THE FUTURE OF CANADA.

IN 1994, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA MADE A CONFESSION TO GOD THAT “OUR CHURCH AGREED TO TAKE THE CHILDREN OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES FROM THEIR HOMES AND PLACE THEM IN [THESE] RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, [WHERE THEY] WERE DEPRIVED OF THEIR TRADITIONAL WAYS, WHICH [WAS] HELPFUL IN THE PROCESS OF ASSIMILATION.

“TO CARRY OUT THIS PROCESS, THE [CHURCH] USED DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES WHICH WERE FOREIGN TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, AND OPEN TO EXPLOITATION IN PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PUNISHMENT BEYOND ANY CHRISTIAN MAXIM OF CARE . . . “; AND,

“AS PART OF THIS POLICY, WE ENCOURAGED THE GOVERNMENT TO BAN SOME IMPORTANT PRACTICES THROUGH WHICH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES EXPERIENCED THE PRESENCE OF THE CREATOR GOD.”

“THE EFFECT OF ALL THIS, FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, WAS THE LOSS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE LOSS OF A SECURE SENSE OF SELF.”

THIS IS WHAT OUR CHURCH CONFESSED TO GOD FIFTEEN (15) YEARS AGO THIS MONTH.

OUR OLD TESTAMENT STORY THIS MORNING—DAVID AND GOLIATH—IS THE KIND OF BIBLE STORY MY DAD MOST ENJOYS.

. . . A CLASSIC STORY OF THE UNDERDOG PREVAILING UNEXPECTEDLY AGAINST A POWERFUL ENEMY, AGAINST INCREDIBLE ODDS.

THE BIBLE IS FULL OF SUCH STORIES WHICH REMIND US OF HOW THE LORD IS A STRONGHOLD FOR THE OPPRESSED. THAT GOD DOES NOT FORGET THE CRY OF THE AFFLICTED. RATHER, THE LORD EXECUTES JUDGEMENT; AND THE WICKED ARE SNARED IN THE WORK OF THEIR OWN HANDS.

IN THIS STORY, GOLIATH IS CLEARLY THE BAD GUY, AND DAVID, THE GOOD GUY.

BUT THINGS START GETTING LESS CLEAR, WHEN WE LOOK TO INTERPRET THIS STORY IN OUR OWN DAY, AND ASK THE QUESTION, WHO IS GOLIATH?

A MAN, SURELY? A PHILISTINE? A GIANT. WE CAN ATTACH ALL KINDS OF LABELS TO GOLIATH. GOLIATH, SEEMS, AT ANY RATE, TO BE HUMAN.

WHO IS GOLIATH? HOW MANY OF US WHEN WE READ THIS STORY IDENTIFY OURSELVES WITH DAVID? THE RELATIVELY SMALL, POORLY ARMED INDIVIDUAL, FIGHTING HOWEVER, WITH THE GOOD GUYS, FIGHTING ON GOD'S SIDE, AGAINST POWERFUL ENEMIES?

HOW MANY OF US SEE OURSELVES AS GOLIATH?

THE MODERN PRACTICE OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY ENCOURAGES US TO READ THE BIBLE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF OTHER PEOPLE, WHO LIVE IN DIFFERENT PLACES FROM US, OR IN DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES.

THIS DISCIPLINE CAN BE IMMENSELY HELPFUL IN OUR EFFORTS TO INTERPRET GOD'S LIVING WORD.

IF WE WERE ALL MEMBERS OF A FIRST NATION COMMUNITY, A METIS COMMUNITY, OR INUIT COMMUNITY, HOW MIGHT WE INTERPRET THE STORY OF DAVID AND GOLIATH?

WOULD WE NOT ALSO BE INCLINED AS ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO SEE OURSELVES AS DAVID? AND WHO MIGHT WE SEE AS GOLIATH?

THE ANSWER SEEMS PRETTY CLEAR. AND IT'S CAN BE A PRETTY UNCOMFORTABLE ANSWER FOR NON-ABORIGINAL CANADIANS.

AS MEMBERS OF ONE OF THE CHURCHES WHICH RAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS IN CANADA, AND AS MEMBERS OF A SOCIETY IN WHICH THERE ARE MANY ABORIGINAL PEOPLE STRUGGLING TO OVERCOME CONDITIONS OF SOCIAL POVERTY, AND OTHERS WHO, WHILE THEY MAY BE LIVING IN STRONG AND HEALTHY FIRST NATION COMMUNITIES, STILL FIND THEY HAVE TO FIGHT FOR FULL RECOGNITION OF THEIR RIGHTS IN CANADA, IT CAN BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO THINK ABOUT HOW AN ABORIGINAL PERSON MIGHT ANSWER THE QUESTION, WHO IS GOLIATH?

INDEED MANY OF US WILL BE TEMPTED TO ARGUE AND DISMISS THE POSSIBILITY THAT WE OURSELVES COULD EVER BE SEEN IN THE ROLE OF GOLIATHS, AS UNJUST OPPRESSORS, AS THOSE WHO WIELD A GREAT DEAL OF POWER OVER THE LIVES OF THE DAVIDS IN THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY. THIS IS CARING THINGS TOO FAR, SURELY. OR IS IT?

THIS QUESTION IS AT THE HEART OF THE TENSION AND ANXIETY THAT I ENCOUNTER, AMONG MEMBERS OF OUR CHURCH, IN MY TRAVELS ABOUT CANADA, WHEN I SPEAK ABOUT THE NEED FOR HEALING AND RECONCILIATION.

RECONCILIATION SEEMS TO INVOLVE RECONCILING OURSELVES TO THE IDEA THAT OUR CHURCH, AND OUR COUNTRY, HAS ACTED, AND MAY BE CONTINUING TO ACT, IN WAYS THAT ALIGN US MORE WITH GOLIATH THAN WITH DAVID, IN OUR STORY FOR SECOND SAMUEL.

WHO IS GOLIATH?

IS IT THAT BLACK AND WHITE? CAN WE REALLY ASSIGN INDIVIDUALS, OR GROUPS OF PEOPLE, TO THE ROLES OF DAVID AND GOLIATH WHEN WE SEEK TO LEARN FROM A SCRIPTURE LESSON SUCH AS THE ONE DARLENE READ TO US THIS MORNING?

YET IF WE ARE QUICK TO SAY MAKING SUCH ANALOGIES IS TOO SIMPLISTIC, WHY DO WE STILL BOTHER LISTENING TO AND READING THIS STORY?

ESPECIALLY WHEN WE COMPARE IT TO PAUL'S TEACHING FROM SECOND CORINTHIANS, WHERE HE WRITES, WITH RINGING ENTHUSIASM AND CLARITY, THAT RECONCILIATION, NOT VIOLENCE, IS OUR CALLING.

WHERE PAUL ASSERTS THAT WE ARE CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS, HIS MINISTERS OF RECONCILIATION: CHRIST HAS RECONCILED US TO GOD, AND HAS GIVEN US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.

OUR LOVE OF CHRIST URGES US ON THIS PATH. AND PAUL URGES US TO LOVE, LIKE CHRIST, REMINDING US THAT WHEN WE LOVE LIKE CHRIST, WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

THIS CALL TO RECONCILE WITH OTHERS IS A CLEAR AND CONSISTENT ECHO OF CHRIST'S NEW COMMANDMENT, THAT WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER, THAT WE LOVE GOLIATH, THE MAN, THE HUMAN BEING, AS GOD HAS LOVED US.

BECAUSE THROUGH CHRIST, EVERYTHING OLD HAS PASSED AWAY, SEE EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW.

FROM NOW ON WE ARE TO REGARD NO ONE FROM A HUMAN POINT OF VIEW, EVEN THOUGH WE ONCE KNEW CHRIST FROM A HUMAN POINT OF VIEW, WE KNOW HIM NO LONGER IN THAT WAY.

COULD IT BE THAT WE ARE LOOKING AT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN CANADA FROM TOO HUMAN A POINT OF VIEW? IS THAT WHY WE CAN GET SO HUNG UP TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHO IS DAVID AND WHO IS GOLIATH IN ANY INSTANCE OF CONFLICT THAT WE MAY CARE TO LOOK AT IN THE WORLD TODAY?

THE EARLIEST TREATIES ENTERED INTO BETWEEN ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN CANADA WERE WAMPUM BELTS. THE BELTS WERE

MADE UP OF PURPLE AND WHITE SHELLS TO SYMBOLIZE HOW THE ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WHO HAD COME TO CANADA WOULD SHARE THE LAND TOGETHER, EACH MAINTAINING THEIR DISTINCTIVE CULTURES AND WAYS OF BEING, WHILE SHARING THE LAND AND MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER INTO THE FUTURE. YOU MAY HAVE HEARD THIS IDEA EXPRESSED AS THE TWO PEOPLES BEING IN TWO SEPARATE CANOES, OR BOATS, BUT TRAVELLING DOWN THE SAME STREAM, SIDE BY SIDE.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE SPEAK OF THE TREATIES AS BEING SACRED, AS BEING ALIVE, AS BEING LIVING AGREEMENTS, AS HAVING SPIRITS: THE SPIRITS OF THE TREATIES.

WHAT DO ABORIGINAL MEAN BY THIS?

THEY CERTAINLY DO NOT MEAN THAT THE TREATY DOCUMENT, THE WAMPUM BELT, OR THE PIECE OF PAPER ON WHICH THE MORE RECENT TREATIES, INCLUDING MODERN LAND CLAIMS SETTLEMENTS, ARE WRITTEN ON, HAVE SPIRITS.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE USE THIS LANGUAGE TO SPEAK TO THE FACT THAT THE TREATIES ARE ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS, THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER CANADIANS. THE SACREDNESS OF THAT RELATIONSHIP IS WHAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE MEAN WHEN THEY DESCRIBE THE TREATIES AS BEING SACRED.

HOW DO NON-ABORIGINAL CANADIANS UNDERSTAND THE TREATIES? DO WE SEE THEM AS SACRED, AS REPRESENTING A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLES: A RELATIONSHIP, WHICH WE KNOW AS GOD'S PEOPLE, NEEDS TO BE ONE OF MUTUAL LOVE?

YOU WILL REMEMBER THAT LAST YEAR OUR GOVERNMENT MADE A STATEMENT OF APOLOGY CONCERNING THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM. TELLING ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES THAT "YOU HAVE BEEN WORKING TO RECOVER FROM THIS EXPERIENCE FOR A LONG TIME, AND IN A VERY REAL SENSE WE [THE REST OF CANADA] ARE NOW JOINING YOU ON THIS JOURNEY.

THIS STATEMENT IS VERY SIMILAR TO THE PROMISE MADE IN OUR CHURCH'S 1994 CONFESSION THAT WE WOULD WALK WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES TO FIND HEALING AND WHOLENESS TOGETHER AS GOD'S PEOPLES.

JOINING TOGETHER ON THE JOURNEY . . . WALKING TOGETHER TO FIND HEALING AND WHOLENESS TOGETHER . . . STRIVING TO REFRAME OUR RELATIONSHIP. REJECTING A HUMAN POINT OF VIEW OF CONFLICT BETWEEN PEOPLES, OF RIGHT AND WRONG, AND REFRAMING OUR RELATIONSHIP FROM GOD'S POINT OF VIEW, IN TERMS OF LOVE, IN TERMS OF RECONCILIATION.

THE ABORIGINAL LEADERS WHO SPOKE IN RESPONSE TO THE APOLOGY UNANIMOUSLY SPOKE IN TERMS OF A PASSING AWAY OF THE OLD, OF EVERYTHING BECOMING NEW, OF THE PROMISE OF RESURRECTION AND NEW LIFE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WHEN THEY TALKED OF THE APOLOGY AS PROVIDING A NEW BEGINNING.

CHIEF FONTAINE SAID NEVER AGAIN WILL CANADIANS CONSIDER US THE "INDIAN PROBLEM" JUST FOR BEING WHO WE ARE.

WE DEARLY NEED TO REFRAME OUR PERSPECTION OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLE. SO MANY WELL MEANING PEOPLE COME UP TO ME TO ASK, WITH GREAT SINCERITY AND CONCERN, LORI, WHEN ARE WE GOING TO SOLVE THE ABORIGINAL PROBLEM?

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME NOT TO ANSWER GLIBLY, WITHOUT HONOURING THE REAL FEELINGS AND CONCERN BEHIND THIS QUESTION, AND YET ONE COULD START BY SUGGESTING THAT WE'LL SOLVE THE PROBLEM, WHEN WE STOP THINKING OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AS A PROBLEM. THERE IS A TRUTH WE NEED TO HEED IN THESE WORDS OF THE NATIONAL CHIEF.

SO WHAT DO WE DO? WHERE DO WE GO FOLLOWING THIS APOLOGY? AND WHAT IS THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA DOING, TO LIVE UP TO ITS

OWN PROMISES TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, MADE IN OUR CONFESSION OF 1994 TO GOD.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION, GEORGES ERASMUS, WHO WAS A FORMER NATIONAL CHIEF, AND ALSO THE CO-CHAIR, OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, WRITES THAT “WHERE PEOPLE DO NOT SHARE IN THE SAME PAST, THERE CAN BE NO REAL COMMUNITY. WHERE COMMUNITY IS TO BE FORMED, COMMON MEMORY MUST BE CREATED.”

THIS IS THE ARGUMENT OF A BOOK I AM NOW READING BY JOHN RAULSTON SAUL, CALLED, “A FAIR COUNTRY,” WHICH SUGGESTS THAT CANADIANS NEED TO REVISIT HOW WE THINK OF OURSELVES, TO DISCOVER, OR UNCOVER, HOW WE HAVE BEEN SHAPED BY OUR NOW CENTURIES LONG RELATIONSHIP WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

MR. ERASMUS TELLS US THAT THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION . . . MANDATED, AS IT HAPPENS, BY THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA, ALONG WITH THE OTHER CHURCHES WHO RAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS . . . WILL HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN HELPING US DEVELOP THAT COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF OUR PAST, AND IN SO DOING HELP US CREATE SHARED HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. AND WE ARE COMMITTED, AS A CHURCH, TO SUPPORTING ITS WORK IN EVERY WAY WE CAN.

SO I INVITE YOU TO FOLLOW THE WORK OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION . . . AND TO PRAY FOR ITS NEWLY APPOINTED COMMISSIONERS, MURRAY SINCLAIR, WILLIE LITTLECHILD, AND MARIE WILSON. LET US HOPE THAT THERE WILL BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PEOPLE OF ST. ANDREW'S, KING STREET, TO JOIN WITH MEMBERS OF THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY IN TORONTO TO HOST COMMISSION EVENTS.

WE HAVE MANY OPPORTUNITIES IN TORONTO TO GROW A COMMUNITY WHICH ENCOMPASSES MEMBERS OF OUR CHURCH AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN THIS CITY.

I WONDER HOW AWARE WE ARE THAT TORONTO IS HOME TO ONE OF THE LARGEST ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES IN CANADA. THE NUMBER OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE LIVING HERE IS GREATER THAN THAT IN THE LARGEST FIRST NATION COMMUNITY, AT NEARBY SIX NATIONS. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT THERE ARE SOME 70,000 ABORIGINAL PEOPLE LIVING IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA, IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE.

WHO IS GOLIATH? MAYBE GOLIATH IS NOT SO MUCH A PERSON BUT MAYBE GOLIATH REPRESENTS EVERYTHING THAT GETS IN THE WAY OF OUR RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL TO US TO OVERCOME EVERYTHING THAT ALIENATES AND ESTRANGES US FROM EACH OTHER.

AND LIKE DAVID WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL NOT TO UNDERESTIMATE OUR ABILITY TO OVERCOME THIS GOLIATH. NOT TO THINK OF THE BARRIERS TO LOVING RELATIONSHIPS AS PROBLEMS THAT ARE TOO BIG FOR US TO TACKLE ON OUR OWN, OR AS PROBLEMS THAT ONLY THOSE WITH POWER: GOVERNMENTS PERHAPS, ACADEMICS, LAWYERS, CONSULTANTS, WHO ARE ARMED WITH INFORMATION, MONEY, AND TIME CAN OVERCOME.

WHY CAN'T WE *STILL* READ THIS MORNING'S TEXT AND SEE OURSELVES AS DAVID? WHO, AFTER ALL, REJECTED THE POWERFUL ARMOUR THAT SAUL TRIED TO CLOTHE HIM WITH, IN FAVOUR OF BEING WHO HE WAS, PREFERRING TO USE THE TOOLS, THE GIFTS THAT HE WAS ACCUSTOMED TO USING, WHO SHOWED US THAT THE GIFTS GIVEN TO HIM BY GOD WERE ALL THAT HE NEEDED TO SUCCESSFULLY CONFRONT INJUSTICE.

LIKE DAVID, WE DON'T NEED TO HAVE ANY SPECIAL TOOLS OR TALENTS TO FULFILL OUR CALLING TO BE MINISTERS OF RECONCILIATION, TO GO OUT AND LEARN ABOUT OUR ABORIGINAL NEIGHBOURS, TO INVITE ABORIGINAL ELDERS, ACADEMICS, BUSINESS OR COMMUNITY LEADERS, ARTISTS, MUSICIANS, SPORTS FIGURES, GRANDMOTHERS, GRANDFATHERS, CHILDREN TO SPEAK TO US ABOUT THEMSELVES, AND HELP US TO DEVELOP A MORE COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF OUR RELATIONSHIP, OUR RELATIONSHIP AS CHILDREN OF THE CREATOR, AS PEOPLE OF SPIRIT, WHO SHARE A DESIRE AND A BELIEF IN PEACEFUL, HARMONIOUS, AND LOVING RELATIONSHIPS.

REMEMBERING LIKE DAVID, THAT WITH GOD, NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE.
REMEMBERING TOO THE WORDS OF CHRIST WHO SAID, PEACE BE WITH YOU.
DO NOT BE AFRAID. I HAVE SENT MY SPIRIT TO HELP YOU.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR. RESPECT AND VALUE EACH OTHER FOR WHAT
MAKES YOU DIFFERENT. GIVE THANKS THAT PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT GIFTS
TO SHARE. WELCOME EVERYONE AT THE TABLE. IF SOME AMONG YOU ARE
HUNGRY, GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT. IF SOME ARE COLD, GIVE THEM
SHELTER. REPENT! IF ANYONE HAS ANYTHING AGAINST YOU, GO AND BE
RECONCILED TO THEM.

THIS IS WHAT WE HAVE BEEN TAUGHT.

THIS IS WHAT HEALING AND RECONCILIATION IS ALL ABOUT.

AMEN.

Psalm 121
2 Cor. 5:14-21
Matt. 22:34-46

REFORMATION AND RECONCILIATION

LET US PRAY:

O SPIRIT, GRANT THAT WE MAY NEVER SEEK SO MUCH TO BE CONSOLED,
AS TO CONSOLE, TO BE UNDERSTOOD, AS TO UNDERSTAND, TO BE LOVED,
AS TO LOVE WITH ALL OUR HEARTS AND MINDS AND SPIRITS.

MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH, AND THE MEDIATIONS OF ALL OF OUR
HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE TO YOU, OH GOD, OUR STRENGTH AND OUR
REDEEMER. AMEN.

GOOD MORNING. THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR INVITING ME TO WORSHIP
WITH YOU TODAY, HERE AT DAYSPRING.

THANK YOU ALSO FOR INVITING ME TO REFLECT WITH YOU ON THE
MINISTRY OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL
PEOPLE—AN IMPORTANT AND A CHALLENGING TOPIC.

AS YOU HEARD WHEN HEINRICH INTRODUCED ME, I AM AN ABORIGINAL
PERSON. I AM A MEMBER OF THE ALGONQUINS OF PIKWAKANAGAN, OR
GOLDEN LAKE, WHICH IS LOCATED ON THE SOUTHEASTERN EDGE OF
ALGONQUIN PROVINCIAL PARK, ABOUT 150 KILOMETRES NORTHWEST OF

OTTAWA, NEAR EGANVILLE. AND, AS IS CUSTOMARY AMONG ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, IT IS AN IMPORTANT CUSTOM FOR ME TO BEGIN BY ACKNOWLEDGING THAT WE ARE WORSHIPPING IN THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF THE NATIONS WHO SIGNED TREATY 6—CREE PEOPLES, WITH THEIR RICH AND POWERFUL HERITAGE.

INTERESTING, IT IS, PARTICULARLY TO ME, THAT IN MANY WAYS IT IS THE CULTURE OF THE CREE, AND OF OTHER INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE GREAT PLAINS OF NORTH AMERICA, THAT BECAME THE DOMINANT IMAGE, IN POPULAR CULTURE, AT LEAST, OF WHAT A NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN LOOKS LIKE, AND HOW A NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN LIVES. THE ORIGINAL PEOPLES OF THE PLAINS HAVE HAD A POWERFUL IMPACT ON OUR WESTERN PSYCHES.

I AM ALSO PLEASED TO BE HERE ON REFORMATION SUNDAY. WHY DO I RATHER LIKE REFORMATION SUNDAY?

WELL, MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I LOVE MOVIES, THEATRE, AND DRAMA AND ON REFORMATION SUNDAY WE COMMEMORATE WHAT IS ARGUABLY THE MOST EXCITING AND DRAMATIC MOMENT IN THE HISTORY OF PROTESTANT, OR REFORMED CHURCHES SUCH AS OURS.

FOR TODAY IS THE DAY, 491 YEARS AGO, WHEN OUR HERO, THE FIRST PROTESTANT, NONE OTHER THAN MARTIN LUTHER, HIMSELF, WITH CUNNING AND BRAVERY, TOOK HIS STAND AGAINST THE EVIL CHURCH AUTHORITIES OF HIS DAY, RISKING HIS VERY STATUS AS A THEOLOGICAL PROFESSOR AND CATHOLIC PRIEST, AND DEFIANTLY HAMMERED HIS 99 THESES ON TO THAT DOOR IN WITTEMBERG. PICTURE MARTIN AS PEARCE BROSNAN, DANIEL CRAIG, OR JOHNNY DEPP, PERHAPS, AND YOU TOO MAY BECOME EXCITED.

YOU CAN FEEL THE TENSION. SOMEONE, ONE OF THOSE EVIL CHURCH AUTHORITIES, MIGHT JUST RIP MARTIN'S PAPERS, HIS 99 THESES, OFF THAT DOOR IN WITTEMBERG . . . AT ANY MOMENT!

HMH . . . A FAMILIAR STORY INDEED. GETTING A LITTLE OLD, PERHAPS?

AND YET I HAVE TO WONDER HOW MUCH TIME WE PROTESTANTS HAVE SPENT THINKING, OVER THE YEARS, ABOUT THE BAD GUYS IN OUR REFORMATION SUNDAY DRAMA? A MOMENT AGO I CALLED THEM, WITH TONGUE DECIDEDLY IN CHEEK, THE EVIL CHURCH AUTHORITIES.

MAYBE WE SHOULD SPARE A THOUGHT FOR THE CHURCH AUTHORITIES OF LUTHER'S DAY. FOR CHURCH AUTHORITIES ARE VERY FAMILIAR CHARACTERS. WE HEAR ABOUT THEM A LOT, ESPECIALLY IN THE BIBLE—

THAT BOOK, WHOSE FAITHFUL INTERPRETATION, MARTIN LUTHER WAS SO EXCITED, SO EXORCISED ABOUT WHEN HE TOOK HIS STAND AT WITTEMBERG.

LUTHER WAS APPALLED WITH THE WAY THE CHURCH AUTHORITIES OF HIS DAY WERE INTERPRETING THE WORD OF GOD. HE HAD AN ISSUE WITH THE CHURCH AUTHORITIES, WITH THE PHARISEES, ONE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO CALL THEM, OF HIS DAY. AH, THE PHARISEES. ANOTHER GROUP OF CHURCH AUTHORITIES.

DO YOU EVER FEEL SORRY FOR THE PHARISEES? TIME AND TIME AGAIN WE READ PASSAGES, LIKE THIS MORNING'S GOSPEL LESSON, WHERE THE PHARISEES ARE HELD UP TO SOME RIDICULE.

OUR LORD JESUS SEEMS TO HAVE HAD A PREDILECTION FOR POINTING OUT THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE PHARISEES. AND YET, TO ALL THE WORLD, THE PHARISEES APPEARED TO BE PARAGONS OF VIRTUE, PIOUS, EXEMPLARY FOLLOWERS OF JEWISH LAW. WE ARE TOLD THEY FASTED, THEY GAVE A TENTH OF ALL THEIR INCOME, THEY PRAYED REGULARLY . . . ALL OF WHICH SOUNDS PRETTY LAUDABLE, DOESN'T IT?

BUT, TIME AND AGAIN, JESUS TELLS A STORY OF HOW, IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, THESE CHURCH AUTHORITIES DID NOT ACT ENTIRELY

FAITHFULLY, DID NOT PRACTICE WHAT THEY PREACHED, ESPECIALLY IN HOW THEY RELATED TO OTHER PEOPLE.

STILL, FOR ALL THEIR FAULTS, DOESN'T IT SEEM SOMETIMES LIKE THE PHARISEES COME IN FOR MORE THAN THEIR SHARE OF CRITICISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

AND, IF YOU TURN TO THE OLD TESTAMENT, IT'S NO BETTER FOR RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES THERE. MANY A PROPHET BECAME A HERO . . . HOW? . . . BY POURING OUT HIS WRATH ON . . . YOU KNOW IT, RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

IT'S EASY IN FACT TO CONCLUDE THAT THE BIBLE IS VERY HARD ON RELIGIOUS PEOPLE. WHAT AN IRONY? AND SO, AS RELIGIOUS PEOPLE, MAYBE WE SHOULD ASK WHY RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES SEEM TO BE SINGLED OUT FOR CORRECTION SO OFTEN BY CHRIST AND OTHER TEACHERS IN THE BIBLE.

MARTIN LUTHER AND THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION BEAR WITNESS TO A TIME WHEN RELIGIOUS PEOPLE BECAME AS CRITICAL OF THEMSELVES, AND HOW THEY WERE PUTTING THEIR FAITH INTO ACTION, AS THE BIBLE SO OFTEN IS CRITICAL OF HOW THE PHARISEES AND OTHER RELIGIOUS PEOPLE LIVED THEIR FAITH.

LET'S NOT FORGET, MARTIN LUTHER WAS A RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY, HIMSELF, ONE OF THE PHARISEES OF HIS TIME IF YOU WILL.

SO NOW WE HAVE THE SUPREME RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY, JESUS CHRIST, CRITICIZING RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES. WE HAVE MARTIN LUTHER, THEOLOGICAL PROFESSOR AND CATHOLIC PRIEST, CRITICIZING HIS RELIGIOUS COLLEAGUES, HIS BISHOP, THE POPE? WHAT DOES ALL THIS SIGNIFY?

AS A CHILD OF THE REFORMATION, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA IS A CHURCH SUBSCRIBES TO THE NOTION THAT OUR FAITH IS ALIVE. "LIVING FAITH" IS THE TITLE OF OUR SUBORDINATE STANDARD.

WE BELIEVE WE ARE A CHURCH THAT IS REFORMED—A CHURCH THAT MUST REMAIN ALWAYS OPEN TO FURTHER REFORMATION, THROUGH THE WORK OF GOD'S LIVING WORD AND LIVING SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES.

AND CENTRAL, I THINK, TO OUR REFORMED TRADITION IS THE IMAGE OF THE PIOUS PHARISEES OF TODAY'S GOSPEL LESSON: THE PHARISEES WHO HAVE HEARD THAT THIS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THIS CARPENTER'S SON, HAS DEVELOPED A REPUTATION FOR TEACHING OTHER RELIGIOUS LEADERS, LIKE THE SADDUCEES . . . FOR TEACHINGS THAT PUSH THE

BOUNDARIES OF BELIEFS HELD DEARLY BY RELIGIOUS PEOPLE, FOR ATTEMPTING TO REFORM THEIR THINKING, BY PROVIDING THEM WITH NEW INSIGHTS INTO THE INTERPRETATION OF HEBREW SCRIPTURE.

THE 22ND CHAPTER OF MATTHEW, FROM WHICH WE READ TODAY, IS FULL OF EXAMPLES OF HOW THE SADDUCEES AND PHARISEES TRIED UNSUCCESSFULLY TO TRIP JESUS UP, ONLY TO FIND THEMSELVES CHANGED, TRANSFORMED.

AND AWESTRUCK BY THE POWERFUL SIMPLICITY OF THE GREAT TEACHING OF TODAY'S LESSON: THAT THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT IS TO LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD, WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.

AND THE SECOND IS LIKE IT, THAT YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF.

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL'S MANY STORIES OF HOW JESUS TAUGHT THE PHARISEES AND THE SADDUCEES, IS THE HEART OF LUTHER'S TEACHING.

AND THAT TEACHING IS THE NEED FOR US, AS RELIGIOUS PEOPLE, AS CHRISTIANS, TO REMAIN OPEN TO THE POSSIBILITY OF REFORMATION, AT FUNDMENTAL LEVELS.

AS RELIGIOUS PEOPLE, AND AS RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF OUR OWN DAY, REGULARLY TO HOLD OURSELVES UP TO THE TEST OF THE BIBLE, THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, THE WORD OF GOD, TO SEE IF WE ARE BEING TRULY FAITHFUL DISCIPLES OF CHRIST, OR WHETHER, IT'S TIME, FOR US TO MAKE A CORRECTION, TO REFORM OURSELVES.

FOURTEEN YEARS AGO, IN 1994, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA MADE A CONFESSION TO GOD CONCERNING THE IMPACT OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE. WE SAID THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS CALLING US TO REFORMATION AGAIN.

WE EXPRESSED OUR PROFOUND SORROW THAT “ABORIGINAL LIVES [HAVE] BEEN DEEPLY SCARRED BY THE MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH,” CONFESSING THAT WE, THE CHURCH, HAD GONE SO FAR AS TO “MISREPRESENT JESUS CHRIST, WHO LOVES ALL PEOPLE.”

AND WE PRAYED FERVENTLY TO GOD TO HELP US TO RECONCILE WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, TO WALK TOGETHER WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO FIND HEALING AND WHOLENESS TOGETHER AS GOD'S PEOPLES.

ON THIS REFORMATION SUNDAY, I SUGGEST THAT TODAY IS A DAY WHEN WE SHOULD CELEBRATE THE COURAGE OF THE 120TH GENERAL

ASSEMBLY OF OUR CHURCH, AND THE AUTHORS OF OUR CONFESSION, WHO IN 1994 FOLLOWED JESUS' EXAMPLE, AND FOLLOWED LUTHER'S EXAMPLE, AND CALLED INTO QUESTION HOW THE CHURCH HAD PUT ITS FAITH INTO ACTION IN THE PAST.

IN OUR CONFESSION, WE AFFIRMED, AS LUTHER AFFIRMED, THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE, SAYING, "THE HOLY SPIRIT, SPEAKING IN AND THROUGH SCRIPTURE, CALLS THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA TO CONFESSION."

OUR CONFESSION PROCLAIMS THAT WE ARE PAYING ATTENTION TO HOW WE INTERPRET THE BIBLE, AND THAT CENTRAL TO BIBLICAL TEACHING, IS OUR NEED TO BE ATTENTIVE TO THE ATTITUDE WE TAKE IN RELATING TO OTHERS: TO REMEMBER THAT THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT IS TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOUR AS OURSELVES.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION, GEORGES ERASMUS, WHO WAS A FORMER NATIONAL CHIEF OF THE ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS, AND ALSO THE CO-CHAIR, OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, REMINDS US THAT THIS TEACHING IS SHARED BY ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

ABORIGINAL SPIRITUAL LEADERS, THE ELDERS, ALSO LIFT UP THE PURSUIT OF RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLES AS A FUNDAMENTAL TENET OF ABORIGINAL SPIRITUAL BELIEFS.

MR. ERASMUS WRITES THAT, “OUR ELDERS TEACH US TO REBUKE BOTH THE THOUGHT AND DEEDS OF HATE, FOR ACCORDING TO THE [ANCIENT ABORIGINAL] TEACHINGS IT IS THE WORK OF HUMAN BEINGS TO PROMOTE THROUGH THEIR THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS PEACE AND RESPECT AMONG THE WORLD’S PEOPLES . . . WE ARE TAUGHT THAT THIS IS WHAT MAKES US FULLY HUMAN. . . .”

DO WE HEAR IN THESE WORDS, THIS TRADITIONAL TEACHING, AN ECHO OF CHRIST’S WORDS TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOURS AS OURSELVES?

CHRIST ALSO SAID THAT WE SHOULD LOVE GOD WITH OUR HEARTS, OUR SOULS, AND OUR MINDS. IN THESE WORDS, I HEAR ANOTHER ECHO. I HEAR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE PRAYING FOR GOOD MINDS, GOOD HEARTS, AND GOOD SPIRITS—A COMMON REFRAIN AMONG ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WHEN THEY COME TOGETHER, PARTICULARLY WHEN THEY COME TOGETHER IN COMMUNITY TO MAKE DECISIONS TOGETHER, WHERE THERE MAY BE DIFFERENCES AMONG THEM, TENSIONS, STRONGLY HELD, OPPOSING VIEWS. THEY PRAY FOR GOOD MINDS AND GOOD HEARTS AND GOOD SPIRITS.

GOOD MINDS, GOOD HEARTS, AND GOOD SPIRITS PREVAILED ONE DAY EARLIER THIS YEAR. YOU MAY REMEMBER THAT DAY. AND, OF ALL PLACES, THESE GOOD MINDS, GOOD HEARTS, AND GOOD SPIRITS PREVAILED IN THE CANADIAN HOUSE OF COMMONS.

HOW ASTONISHING IS THAT? HOW WONDERFUL. HOW IMPOSSIBLE.

I AM SPEAKING OF THE DAY ON WHICH THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA APOLOGIZED TO ABORIGINAL INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES FOR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS. IN MAKING THE APOLOGY, PRIME MINISTER HARPER TOLD THE FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLES OF THIS COUNTRY THAT “THE BURDEN OF THIS EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN ON YOUR SHOULDERS FOR TOO LONG.

THE BURDEN IS PROPERLY OURS AS A GOVERNMENT, AND AS A COUNTRY. THERE IS NO PLACE IN CANADA FOR THE ATTITUDES THAT INSPIRED THE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM TO EVER PREVAIL AGAIN. YOU HAVE BEEN WORKING ON RECOVERING FROM THIS EXPERIENCE FOR A LONG TIME AND IN A VERY REAL SENSE, WE ARE NOW JOINING YOU ON THIS JOURNEY.”

WE CANADIANS ARE JOINING ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ON THE JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION. THIS IS A CALL FOR A REFORMATION. FOR A RETHINKING OF HOW THE PEOPLES OF THIS NATION TREAT EACH OTHER, FOR REFLECTION ON WHETHER WE ARE TREATING OUR NEIGHBOURS AS OURSELVES, AND IF NOT, HOW WE NEED TO REFORM OUR THINKING AND OUR ACTIONS TO LIVE AS GOD HAS CALLED US TO LIVE.

THE ABORIGINAL LEADERS WHO SPOKE IN RESPONSE TO THE APOLOGY UNANIMOUSLY SPOKE IN TERMS OF A PASSING AWAY OF THE OLD, OF EVERYTHING BECOMING NEW, OF THE PROMISE OF RESURRECTION AND NEW LIFE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WHEN THEY SPOKE OF THE APOLOGY AS PROVIDING A NEW BEGINNING.

WE REMEMBER AS CHRISTIANS THAT OUR LIFE IN CHRIST DID NOT END IN CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION; INDEED, WE KNOW THAT CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION IS A STARTING POINT FOR NEW LIFE. IT IS A CALL TO US TO LEAD A NEW LIFE, AS SERVANTS OF THE LORD, WHO ARE SENT INTO THE WORLD TO BE A LIGHT FOR THE WORLD.

THIS IS THE MESSAGE ST. PAUL GIVES US IN OUR PASSAGE FROM SECOND CORINTHIANS THIS MORNING. IT IS THE LOVE OF CHRIST URGES US ON. HE DIED FOR US, NOT COUNTING OUR TRESPASSES AGAINST US, IN ORDER TO RECONCILE US TO GOD, WHO HAS GIVEN US THE MINISTRY OF

RECONCILIATION. GOD ENTRUSTS US WITH THIS MINISTRY, GOD TRUST US TO BE HIS AMBASSADORS, TO BE HIS PEACEMAKERS, RECONCILERS WITH OTHERS.

FOR WE, PAUL WRITES, MAY BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

WOW! WE MAY BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD. IS THIS NOT A REASON TO CELEBRATE.

AND SO I THINK WE HAVE REASON, AS A CHURCH, TO BE PUMPED UP, TO BE EXCITED ABOUT THE OPPORTUNITY IN OUR OWN DAY TO BE REFORMERS, TO BE RECONCILERS IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLES OF CANADA.

NOW I KNOW THAT IT'S HARD FOR US TO SEE OUR WAY FORWARD, TO IMAGINE HOW WE ARE GOING TO BUILD A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

THERE IS A LEGACY OF MISUNDERSTANDING AND A LACK OF TRUST THAT DID NOT MELT AWAY WHEN WE MADE OUR CONFESSION IN 1994, ANY MORE THAN IT MELTED AWAY WHEN THE PRIME MINISTER APOLOGIZED ON JUNE 11TH OF THIS YEAR.

THE ISSUES IN OUR RELATIONSHIP RUN DEEP, REFLECTING A COMPLEX HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANT QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT THAT HISTORY MEANS IN A MODERN CANADA. ISSUES THAT ARE AS COMPLEX, AND RUN AS DEEP FOR OUR COUNTRY, AS THE ISSUES OF WHAT IS WAS TO BE THE CHURCH IN MARTIN LUTHER'S DAY.

YET I BELIEVE THAT THE BASIC STEPS IN RECONCILING WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ARE SIMPLE. I TRULY BELIEVE THEY ARE SIMPLE. WE'VE BEEN TAUGHT HOW TO DO IT. CHRIST GAVE US THE EXAMPLE. HE DARED TO INVITE THOSE WHO HAD BEEN IGNORED AND EXCLUDED BY OTHERS TO BE WITH HIM, TO TALK TO HIM, TO GET TO KNOW HIM, TO BREAK BREAD WITH HIM: THIEVES, ROGUES, ADULTERERS, TAX COLLECTORS, AND, YES, EVEN SADDUCEES AND PHARISEES.

IT'S THAT SIMPLE. THIS IS THE APPROACH WE NEED TO MAKE WHEN REACHING OUT TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE: CHRIST'S APPROACH: OPEN, INTERESTED, NON-JUDGEMENTAL, READY TO SHOW OUR LOVE FOR OTHERS.

SO I WANT TO CLOSE BY INVITING YOU TO CONSIDER HOW DAYSPRING CAN CELEBRATE OUR CALL TO RECONCILE WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, AND IN DOING SO TO CELEBRATE OUR REFORMED HERITAGE, THAT

ENCOURAGES US TO BE HEROIC INTERPRETERS OF SCRIPTURE, WHO ARE NOT AFRAID TO STRIKE OUT IN NEW DIRECTIONS TO LIVE OUR FAITH.

REDOUBLE EFFORTS YOU MAY ALREADY BE MAKING TO FIND WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY IN THE CITY OF EDMONTON. WHETHER THAT'S THROUGH YOUR SUPPORT OF EDMONTON URBAN NATIVE MINISTRIES, OR THROUGH CONNECTIONS THAT CAN BUILT UP WITH ABORIGINAL INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS IN THE CITY, OR PERHAPS WITH NEIGHBOURING FIRST NATIONS SUCH AS THE ALEXANDER OR ENOCH CREE COMMUNITIES.

VISIT NATIVE COMMUNITIES, TAKE PART IN THEIR CELEBRATIONS, SUCH AS THEIR SUMMER-TIME POW WOWS—TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY GATHERINGS TO GIVE THANKS TO THE CREATOR.

INVITE ABORIGINAL ELDERS, ACADEMICS, BUSINESS OR COMMUNITY LEADERS, SPORTS HEROES, OR NATIVE ARTISTS, THEATRE PEOPLE, WRITERS, ACTORS TO SPEAK TO US ABOUT THEMSELVES. LISTENING INTENTLY, AND RESPONDING PRAYERFULLY, TO OTHERS' PERSPECTIVES IS A BEAUTIFUL WAY TO BEGIN THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION.

WE WILL BE AIDED IN THIS JOURNEY BY A PROCESS THAT WE THE CHURCHES HAVE SET UP WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA AND THE

ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS. THAT PROCESS MADE THE NEWS THIS WEEK. I SPEAK OF CANADA'S TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION.

THE NEWS YOU MAY HAVE HEARD WAS THAT THE CHIEF COMMISSIONER OF THE COMMISSION RESIGNED THIS WEEK, AND, LIKE ALL CANADIANS, ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL, YOU MAY BE WORRIED ABOUT WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION.

THE JOURNEY THAT THE PRIME MINISTER SPOKE ABOUT, THE JOURNEY TO HEALING AND WHOLENESS AMONG ALL PEOPLE'S OF CANADA, DESCRIBED IN OUR CONFESSION, IS A DIFFICULT ONE. AND WHAT'S IMPORTANT ARE NOT THE BUMPS ALONG THE ROAD, BUT THE ROAD ITSELF, AND OUR COMMITMENT TO IT, OUR FAITH IN THE CALL TO RECONCILIATION. SO I ASK YOU TO PRAY FOR THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION—THE COMMISSION MANDATED BY OUR CHURCH AND ALL THE CHURCHES WHO RAN THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS TO WORK FOR US.

I INVITE YOU TO FOLLOW THE COMMISSION WHEN IT BEGINS ITS IMPORTANT WORK. FOR THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION WILL FACILITATE THE PROCESS OF BUILDING WHAT GEORGES ERASMUS DESCRIBES AS COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND SHARED HOPE, AMONG THE PEOPLES OF THIS NATIONS.

CONSIDER PUTTING ASIDE TIME TO LISTEN TO THE STORIES THAT
ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WILL TELL THE COMMISSION.

WE KNOW THAT LISTENING, THOUGHTFULLY AND PRAYERFULLY, TO
ANOTHER PERSON'S STORY CAN BE A POWERFUL WAY TO LOVE OUR
NEIGHBOUR AS OURSELVES.

SO LET'S OPEN OUR HEARTS, OUR MINDS, AND OUR SPIRITS TO WHAT WE
MAY LEARN BY LISTENING TO OUR FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS
BROTHERS AND SISTERS—IN WHOM WE ALSO SEE THE FACE OF CHRIST—
OPENING OURSELVES TO THE POSSIBILITY OF TRANSFORMATION AS
GOD'S SPIRIT SPEAKS TO US AGAIN.

FOR SINCE WE ARE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH, WE HAVE PEACE WITH GOD,
THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THROUGH WHOM WE HAVE
OBTAINED ACCESS TO THIS GRACE IN WHICH WE STAND; AND WE BOAST
IN OUR HOPE OF SHARING THE GLORY OF GOD, WHO IS OUR ALMIGHTY
FORTRESS, OUR REFUGE NEVER FAILING, OUR HELPER IN THE MIDST OF
STRIFE, WHOSE REIGN ENDURES FOREVER.

AMEN.

Genesis 18:1-15 – hospitality to strangers; Sarah laughs: is anything too wonderful for the Lord?

Romans 5:1-11 – suffering produces endurance; endurance, character; character, hope. God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us . . . in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . we have now received reconciliation

Matthew 5:21-24 – go leave your gift before the altar; first be reconciled

THE WONDER OF RECONCILIATION

LET US PRAY: CREATOR SPIRIT, COMFORTER, ADVOCATE, GRANT THAT WE MAY NEVER SEEK SO MUCH TO BE CONSOLED, AS TO CONSOLE, TO BE UNDERSTOOD, AS TO UNDERSTAND, TO BE LOVED, AS TO LOVE WITH ALL OUR HEARTS, OUR MINDS AND OUR SPIRITS.

“FOR IF WHILE WE WERE ENEMIES, WE WERE RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH THE DEATH OF HIS SON, MUCH MORE SURELY, HAVING BEEN RECONCILED, WILL WE BE SAVED BY HIS LIFE, . . . THROUGH WHOM WE HAVE NOW RECEIVED RECONCILIATION.”

FOR IF WHILE WE WERE ENEMIES . . . IN THE NOW CENTURIES LONG RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN CANADA, THERE HAVE BEEN ALL TOO MANY TIMES DURING WHICH OUR RELATIONSHIP HAS FELT LIKE THAT BETWEEN ENEMIES.

IT HAS BEEN A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLE WHO DON'T UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER

Reflection to begin Local Leaders' Training, June 19, 2008 by Lori Ransom

BETWEEN PEOPLE WHO HAVE FAILED TO APPRECIATE EACH OTHERS' CULTURE, TRADITIONS AND WAYS OF LIFE.

BETWEEN PEOPLE WHO HAVE DIFFERENT IDEAS ABOUT LAND USE AND OWNERSHIP, AND DIFFERENT IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO GOVERN A COMMUNITY

AND YET, OUR BIBLICAL TEXTS THIS MORNING REMIND US THAT WE ARE CALLED TO BE A PEOPLE OF HOPE, IN ALL PLACES AND IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.

FOR WE HAVE ALREADY EXPERIENCED WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE ALIENATED AND TO BE RECONCILED. FOR WE WERE ALIENATED FROM GOD, AND WE HAVE BEEN RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH THE LIFE, WITNESS, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST, WHO CALLS US TO LIVE IN LOVING RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS, BOASTING IN OUR HOPE OF SHARING THE GLORY OF GOD, INSPIRED AND SUSTAINED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO US.

AND SO WE KNOW HOW TO RESPOND WHEN REMINDED, AS CHRIST REMINDED US IN OUR PASSAGE FROM MATTHEW: THAT IF WE REMEMBER THAT OUR BROTHERS OR SISTERS HAVE SOMETHING AGAINST US, WE MUST LEAVE OUR GIFTS THERE BEFORE THE ALTAR AND GO, AND FIRST BE RECONCILED TO OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, AND THEN COME AND OFFER OUR GIFTS.

CHRIST TELLS US THAT OUR FIRST RESPONSIBILITY IS TO OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS ON EARTH. OUR FIRST RESPONSIBILITY IS TO PURSUE LOVING RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER, AND IF THINGS HAVE GONE WRONG IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS, IF ENMITY OR ILL FEELINGS HAVE DEVELOPED BETWEEN US, IT IS OUR FIRST CALLING, BEFORE WE EVEN APPROACH GOD IN WORSHIP, TO LEAVE OUR GIFTS BEFORE THE ALTAR, AND GO, AND FIRST MAKE SURE WE HAVE DONE WHAT IS NECESSARY TO RECONCILE WITH EACH OTHER.

AT THIS POINT IN OUR HISTORY, IN CANADA, WE CELEBRATE A PROFOUND, AND MEANINGFUL ACT OF RECONCILIATION, AN EFFORT WE CANADIANS HAVE MADE BEFORE GOD, TO GO AND FIRST BE RECONCILED TO OUR FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

JUST OVER A WEEK AGO, OUR GOVERNMENT, APOLOGIZED ON OUR BEHALF TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE FOR ATTEMPTING TO ASSIMILATE THEM THROUGH THE OFTEN HARSH AND UNLOVING SYSTEM OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS. WE ARE MOVING, I THINK INEXORICABLY, TOWARDS A DAY WHEN THERE WILL BE A DEEP AND PROFOUND RECONCILIATION BETWEEN PEOPLES IN CANADA.

I TRULY AND SINCERELY BELIEVE THIS.

AND I BELIEVE PROFOUNDLY THAT IT IS GOD'S LOVE, AND ACTION IN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS AND SPIRITS, THAT IS LEADING US FORWARD.

THE NATIONAL CHIEF OF THE ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS, PHIL FONTAINE, UNDERLINED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS MOMENT IN OUR HISTORY, IN HIS RESPONSE TO THE APOLOGY. HE SAID, "THIS DAY TESTIFIES TO NOTHING LESS THAN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE IMPOSSIBLE."

LET'S THINK ABOUT THAT FOR A MOMENT. "THIS DAY TESTIFIES TO NOTHING LESS THAN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE IMPOSSIBLE."

WOW! THIS IS NOT JUST A THROW AWAY LINE, SAID IN THE EMOTIONAL HEAT OF WHAT WAS CERTAINLY A MOMENT FRAUGHT WITH EMOTION. THESE WORDS ARE FOUND IN HIS PREPARED TEXT. THIS TESTIFIES TO NOTHING LESS THAN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE IMPOSSIBLE." HE, AND THE STAFF OF THE ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS, REFLECTED CAREFULLY ON THESE WORDS, AND MADE A THOUGHTFUL CHOICE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT FOR THEM, THE IMPOSSIBLE HAD BEEN ACHIEVED. THE IMPOSSIBLE: ACHIEVED!

FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, RECONCILIATION AND THE JUST RESOLUTION OF HISTORIC WRONGS HAVE LONG SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE.

FOR NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TOO, CANADIANS, WHO ARE THE DESCENDANTS OF PEOPLE WHO EMIGRATED TO THIS COUNTRY DECADES AND CENTURIES AGO, AS WELL AS FOR MORE RECENT IMMIGRANTS, ISSUES PERTAINING TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND THEIR RIGHTS, PARTICULARLY LAND CLAIMS RESOLUTION, ALSO SEEM IMPOSSIBLE, DON'T THEY? THEY SEEM LIKE PROBLEMS THAT WILL NEVER BE RESOLVED, THAT WILL REMAIN AN ALBATROSS AROUND OUR NATION'S NECK, FOR DECADES, OR EVEN CENTURIES TO COME.

AND YET, THIS WEEK, ON JUNE 11TH, SOMETHING THAT SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE TOOK PLACE.

AS PEOPLE OF FAITH, SHOULD WE BE SURPRISED? HOW OFTEN, IN HISTORY, HAS GOD ACTED IN WAYS THAT SEEM IMPOSSIBLE?

AND YET, WE OFTEN FIND OURSELVES LAUGHING RUEFULLY AT THE NOTION THAT CERTAIN PROBLEMS WILL BE SOLVED IN OUR LIFE TIMES, DON'T WE? WE LAUGH. AS THOSE TIME-HONOURED, NAYSAYERS, THE PHARISEES LAUGHED AT THE NOTION THAT A HUMBLE CARPENTER FROM NAZARETH COULD BE THE MESSIAH, THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD. AS SARAH LAUGHED, WHEN SHE WAS TOLD BY A VISITING STRANGER THAT SHE WOULD BEAR A SON IN HER OLD AGE, AND WITH ABRAHAM, BECOME PARENTS TO NATIONS OF PEOPLE.

AND YET WE STILL LAUGH. WE STILL DOUBT. EVEN IN THE FACE OF THE TESTIMONY OF OUR ANCESTORS IN THE FAITH, FOR TIME IMMEMORIAL, THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL: GOD FULFILLS THE COVENANTS GOD MAKES WITH HIS PEOPLE. GOD DOES THE IMPOSSIBLE. IS ANYTHING TOO WONDERFUL FOR THE LORD?

I WAS PRIVILEGED LAST WEEK TO WITNESS THE WONDER ON THE FACES OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WHO ATTENDED THE APOLOGY CEREMONY. OUR NEW MODERATOR, THE REV. CHEOL SOON PARK, AND OTHER REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA, ACCOMPANIED EIGHT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO PARLIAMENT HILL FOR THE APOLOGY CEREMONY. SEVEN OF THESE INDIVIDUALS WENT TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL; FIVE TO SCHOOLS RUN BY THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA, AT BIRTLE IN WESTERN MANITOBA, AND AT CECELIA JEFFREY, IN NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO.

THERE WAS WONDER ON THEIR FACES, AS THEY SAT WITH US, AT A WONDERFUL RECEPTION, ON THE EVE OF THE APOLOGY, THAT WAS ORGANIZED BY THE ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS IN A DOWNTOWN OTTAWA HOTEL BALLROOM. SOME OF THE BEST ABORIGINAL ENTERTAINERS IN CANADA PERFORMED BEFORE US. THE NATIONAL CHIEF, AND LEADER OF THE INUIT TAPIRIT KANATAMI, MARY SIMON, ADDRESSED US.

THERE WAS WONDER ON THE FACES OF OUR FIRST NATION GUESTS AS THEY LUNCHEDED WITH OUR MODERATOR AT LE CAFE, AT THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE OF CANADA. INDEED ONE OF THE SURVIVORS, WHO IS WITH US TODAY, VIVIAN KETCHUM, WHO HAD BROUGHT HER SON, TYLER, TO WITNESS THE APOLOGY CEREMONY, COMMENTED THAT AFTER A MEAL LIKE THAT, TYLER WOULD NEVER BE SATISFIED WITH HER COOKING AGAIN.

THERE WAS WONDER ON THE FACES OF ANN CALAHAN, AND JOSEPHINE MONKMAN, TWO SURVIVORS FROM BIRTLE WHO HAD NOT SEEN EACH OTHER IN 50 YEARS. THESE NOW ELDERLY WOMEN BONDED, AS SOMEONE COMMENTED, LIKE SCHOOL GIRLS. THE YEARS MELTING AWAY, AS THEY ACCOMPANIED EACH OTHER TO EVENTS, AND ARM IN ARM NEGOTIATED THE OTTAWA STREETS.

AFTER THE APOLOGY CEREMONY ANN HAD A COPY OF THE APOLOGY SIGNED BY THE PRIME MINISTER. AND THERE WAS WONDER ON HER FACE AS SHE TALKED ABOUT THE MEANING OF HAVING WATCHED HIM SIGN AND PRESENT HER WITH THE APOLOGY, A DOCUMENT SIGNED BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA, MADE IT REAL. SHE WOULD SHOW IT TO THE MEMBERS OF HER COMMUNITY, BACK HOME, TO MAKE THE APOLOGY REAL FOR THEM. AND THERE WAS DELIGHTFUL WONDER ON ANN'S FACE, AS SHE COMMENTED REPEATEDLY ON HOW YOUNG THE PRIME MINISTER IS, HOW TALL, WITH SUCH DEEP BLUE EYES!

IMAGINE THE WONDER OF THE JOURNEY OF THESE SURVIVORS. THEY BROUGHT PICTURES WITH THEM OF THEIR DAYS AT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS TO SHOW OUR MODERATOR. HERE THEY WERE SPENDING A DAY WITH, AND BEING TREATED WITH HONOUR, AND WITH LOVE, BY THE MODERATOR OF THE CHURCH WHICH HAD RUN THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS THEY ATTENDED.

HOW STRANGE, HOW WONDERFUL THIS DAY MUST HAVE BEEN FOR THEM. HOW IMPOSSIBLE!

WHEN WE THINK ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES AT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, WHICH WE NOW KNOW, FOR ALL TOO MANY, INCLUDED PHYSICAL AND EVEN SEXUAL ABUSE, ONE WONDERS, HOW HARD IS IT FOR THESE, OUR FIRST NATION BROTHERS AND SISTERS, TO “BOAST IN THEIR SUFFERINGS, KNOWING THAT SUFFERING PRODUCES ENDURANCE, AND ENDURANCE PRODUCES CHARACTER, AND CHARACTER PRODUCES HOPE, AND HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT US, BECAUSE GOD’S LOVE HAS BEEN POURED INTO OUR HEARTS THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.”

WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL HOW WE READ OUR TEXT FROM ROMANS THIS MORNING. FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SUFFERED GREATLY, THESE WORDS MAY SOUND INSPIRING, A CALL TO JUST BE STRONG, TO TAKE OUR KNOCKS, AND CARRY ON, BECAUSE THINGS WILL GET BETTER.

BUT HOW EASY IS IT, FOR SOMEONE LIKE TED QUEZEWANCE, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS SURVIVORS SOCIETY, SPOKE TO OUR GENERAL ASSEMBLY EARLIER THIS MONTH, AND DESCRIBED THE SEXUAL ABUSE HE SUFFERED AT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL FOR 6 YEARS, AS A BOY, TO BOAST IN HIS SUFFERINGS, AND BELIEVE IN GOD'S LOVE, IN THE FACE OF WHAT HE WENT THROUGH?

AND YET, TED'S PRESENCE AT GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND DURING THE LEADERS' TOUR, HIS WORK FOR MANY YEARS AS AN ADVOCATE FOR SURVIVORS, VIVIAN'S WORK WITH THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA FOR MANY YEARS, AND THE PRESENCE OF SO MANY SURVIVORS ON PARLIAMENT HILL LAST WEEK, SPEAK TO HOPE, A HOPE WE SHOULD HOLD PROFOUNDLY, A HOPE THAT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE.

WE ARE REMINDED IN OUR TEXT THAT IT IS WAS WHILE WE WERE STILL WEAK, THAT CHRIST DIED FOR US, THE UNGODLY—UNGODLY IN OUR FAILINGS TO BE LIKE GOD, TO LOVE LIKE GOD.

GOD KNEW WE NEEDED CHRIST'S RECONCILING LOVE. AND SO GOD PROVED HIS LOVE FOR US IN THAT WHILE WE STILL WERE SINNERS CHRIST DIED FOR US.

THIS ACT OF LOVE IS ALSO SOMETHING WE WONDER AT: SOMETHING THAT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE. WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US, AND RECONCILED US TO GOD.

MOREOVER, WE HAVE ALL THE MORE REASON TO WONDER, BECAUSE GOD NOT ONLY LOVES US, BUT TRUSTS US TO LEARN FROM CHRIST'S ACT OF RECONCILIATION AND COUNTS ON US TO BE RECONCILERS OURSELVES, AS ST. PAUL TELLS US IN SECOND CORINTHIANS, CHAPTER 5. HE SAYS, WE ARE TO BE CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS, CHRIST'S MINISTERS OF RECONCILIATION.

IN CHRIST, THE IMPOSSIBLE IS ACHIEVED. EVERYTHING OLD HAS PASSED AWAY, EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW. IT IS WONDERFUL! FOR WE HAVE BEEN RECONCILED TO GOD, AND ARE ENTRUSTED WITH THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.

THE ABORIGINAL LEADERS WHO SPOKE IN RESPONSE TO THE APOLOGY UNANIMOUSLY SPOKE IN TERMS OF A PASSING AWAY OF THE OLD, OF EVERYTHING BECOMING NEW, OF THE PROMISE OF RESURRECTION AND NEW LIFE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WHEN THEY TALKED OF THE APOLOGY AS PROVIDING A NEW BEGINNING.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION, GEORGES ERASMUS, WHO WAS A FORMER NATIONAL CHIEF, AND ALSO THE CO-CHAIR, OF

THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, REMINDS US THAT THIS TEACHING IS SHARED BY ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

ABORIGINAL SPIRITUAL LEADERS, THE ELDERS, ALSO LIFT UP THE PURSUIT OF RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLES AS A FUNDAMENTAL TENET OF ABORIGINAL SPIRITUAL BELIEFS.

MR. ERASMUS WRITES THAT, “OUR ELDERS TEACH US TO REBUKE BOTH THE THOUGHT AND DEEDS OF HATE, FOR ACCORDING TO THE [ANCIENT ABORIGINAL] TEACHINGS IT IS THE WORK OF HUMAN BEINGS TO PROMOTE THROUGH THEIR THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS PEACE AND RESPECT AMONG THE WORLD’S PEOPLES . . . WE ARE TAUGHT THAT THIS IS WHAT MAKES US FULLY HUMAN. . . . HEALING CONSISTS IN REPLACING THE LEGACY OF RACISM WITH A LEGACY OF RECONCILIATION AND PEACE BETWEEN PEOPLES. OUR WELL-BEING DEPENDS UPON THE SUCCESS OF THIS ENDEAVOUR.”

CHIEF FONTAINE SAID NEVER AGAIN WILL THIS HOUSE CONSIDER US THE “INDIAN PROBLEM” JUST FOR BEING WHO WE ARE.

WE DEARLY NEED TO REFRAME OUR PERSPECTION OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLE. SO MANY WELL MEANING PEOPLE COME UP TO ME TO ASK, WITH GREAT SINCERITY AND CONCERN, LORI, WHEN ARE WE GOING TO SOLVE THE ABORIGINAL PROBLEM?

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IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME NOT TO ANSWER GLIBLY, WITHOUT HONOURING THE REAL FEELINGS AND CONCERN BEHIND THIS QUESTION, AND YET ONE COULD START BY SUGGESTING THAT WE'LL SOLVE THE PROBLEM, WHEN WE STOP THINKING OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AS A PROBLEM. THERE IS A TRUTH WE NEED TO HEED IN THESE WORDS OF THE NATIONAL CHIEF.

GEORGES ERASMUS EXPLAINS THAT, "WHERE COMMUNITY IS TO BE FORMED, COMMON MEMORY MUST BE CREATED. . . [AND] THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION, IN BEARING WITNESS TO WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE, WILL HELP TO CREATE COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND SHARED HOPE THAT WILL BENEFIT ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN CANADA LONG INTO THE FUTURE."

CREATE COLLECTIVE MEMORY, AND CREATE SHARED HOPE. IS THIS NOT WONDERFUL? DO WE LAUGH? DOES THIS TASK OF CREATING SHARED MEMORY AND SHARED HOPE BETWEEN ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN CANADA SEEM IMPOSSIBLE? OR DOES IT SEEM LIKE AN IMPOSSIBILITY THAT WE CAN ACHIEVE, WITH GOD'S HELP?

LET'S SPEND THE NEXT DAY AND A HALF THINKING ABOUT WHAT WE ARE CALLED TO DO.

Genesis 18:1-15 – hospitality to strangers; Sarah laughs: is anything too wonderful for the Lord?

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19 – I am your servant; commentary (Brueggemann, et al): “This psalm reflects on how to make adequate response to the good news of God. . . . To ‘call on him’ means to entrust all future life, all future need and trouble to God.”

Romans 5:1-11 – suffering produces endurance; endurance, character; character, hope. God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us . . . in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . we have now received reconciliation

Matthew 5:21-24 – go leave your gift before the altar; first be reconciled

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AND MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH, AND THE MEDIATIONS OF ALL OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE TO YOU, OH GOD, OUR STRENGTH, OUR ROCK, AND OUR REDEEMER. AMEN.

GOOD MORNING. IT IS SO GOOD TO HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO WORSHIP WITH YOU HERE AT WEST FLAMBORO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

AND IT IS AN HONOUR TO BE INVITED TO SPEAK TO YOU ON ABORIGINAL DAY SUNDAY—A DAY ON WHICH WE CELEBRATE OUR COMMUNITY IN CANADA WITH FIRST NATION, INUIT, AND METIS PEOPLE. WHEN WE HONOUR THEIR

Sermon for West Flamboro PC, Ontario, Sunday, June 15, 2008 by Lori Ransom

PLACE AS THE FIRST PEOPLES OF THIS LAND, AND LOOK FORWARD TO A WONDERFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH FIRST NATION, INUIT, AND METIS PEOPLES IN THE FUTURE.

AS YOU HEARD WHEN _____ INTRODUCED ME, I AM AN ABORIGINAL PERSON, MYSELF. I AM A MEMBER OF THE ALGONQUINS OF PIKWAKANAGAN, OR GOLDEN LAKE, WHICH IS LOCATED ON THE SOUTHEASTERN EDGE OF ALGONQUIN PROVINCIAL PARK, ABOUT 150 KILOMETRES NORTHWEST OF OTTAWA, NEAR EGANVILLE. AND, AS IS TRADITIONAL AMONG ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT I ACKNOWLEDGE WITH THANKS, OUR OPPORTUNITY TO WORSHIP HERE IN THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF MY ANISHINABE COUSINS, THE MISSISSAUGAS, WHO HAVE LIVED IN THIS AREA FOR MANY CENTURIES.

“FOR IF WHILE WE WERE ENEMIES, WE WERE RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH THE DEATH OF HIS SON, MUCH MORE SURELY, HAVING BEEN RECONCILED, WILL WE BE SAVED BY HIS LIFE, . . . THROUGH WHOM WE HAVE NOW RECEIVED RECONCILIATION.”

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IMAGINE THE WONDER OF THE JOURNEY OF THESE SURVIVORS. THEY BROUGHT PICTURES WITH THEM OF THEIR DAYS AT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS TO SHOW OUR MODERATOR. HERE THEY WERE SPENDING A DAY WITH, AND BEING TREATED WITH HONOUR, AND WITH LOVE, BY THE MODERATOR OF THE CHURCH WHICH HAD RUN THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS THEY ATTENDED.

HOW STRANGE, HOW WONDERFUL THIS DAY MUST HAVE BEEN FOR THEM. HOW IMPOSSIBLE!

IMAGINE THEIR JOURNEY. THINK BACK TO WHEN THEY WERE LITTLE CHILDREN; WHEN SOMEONE ARRIVED AT THEIR HOMES TO TAKE THEM AWAY FROM THEIR PARENTS, LEAVING THEM CRYING IN DISTRESS, BEWILDERED BY WHAT WAS HAPPENING; THINK ABOUT HOW THEY SUDDENLY FOUND THEMSELVES FAR AWAY AT A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL; WHERE THEY IMMEDIATELY WERE SEPARATED BROTHERS FROM SISTERS, INTO SEPARATE, BOYS AND GIRLS DORMS, AND TAUGHT THAT THE LANGUAGE, CUSTOMS, AND WAY SO LIVING OF THEIR PARENTS WERE WRONG, WHERE THEY WERE PUNISHED FOR SPEAKING TO EACH OTHER IN THEIR NATIVE TONGUES.

THINK OF HOW YEARS LATER, AS YOUNG ADULTS, THEY WENT BACK TO THEIR COMMUNITIES. HOW JOSEPHINE AND ANN, WHO HAD FOUND A BOND OF FRIENDSHIP AT SCHOOL, WERE SENT BACK TO COMMUNITIES SO SEPARATED

FROM EACH OTHER THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE EACH OTHER FOR ANOTHER 50 YEARS.

THINK OF VIVIAN, WHOSE BROTHER WENT TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, BUT WHO LATER SUCCUMBED TO THE EFFECTS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE, AT A YOUNG AGE, HAVING STRUGGLED TO FIND A PLACE FOR HIMSELF IN SOCIETY UNSUCCESSFULLY, DESPITE THE SCHOOLING THAT WAS SUPPOSED TO MAKE HIM SUCCEED IN A “WHITE” WORLD.

ONE WONDERS, HOW HARD IS IT FOR THESE, OUR FIRST NATION BROTHERS AND SISTERS, TO “BOAST IN THEIR SUFFERINGS, KNOWING THAT SUFFERING PRODUCES ENDURANCE, AND ENDURANCE PRODUCES CHARACTER, AND CHARACTER PRODUCES HOPE, AND HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT US, BECAUSE GOD’S LOVE HAS BEEN POURED INTO OUR HEARTS THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.”

WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL HOW WE READ OUR TEXT FROM ROMANS THIS MORNING. FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SUFFERED GREATLY, THESE WORDS MAY SOUND INSPIRING, A CALL TO JUST BE STRONG, TO TAKE OUR KNOCKS, AND CARRY ON, BECAUSE THINGS WILL GET BETTER.

VIVIAN’S BROTHER SUFFERED, AND DIED.

TED QUEZEWANCE, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS SURVIVORS SOCIETY, SPOKE TO OUR GENERAL ASSEMBLY EARLIER THIS MONTH, AND DESCRIBED THE SEXUAL ABUSE HE SUFFERED AT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL FOR 6 YEARS, AS A BOY. HE STILL HURTS, HE STILL CRIES THINKING ABOUT THIS EXPERIENCE, AS A MAN, NOW IN HIS SIXTIES, AND A LEADER AMONG HIS PEOPLE.

HOW EASY IS IT FOR VIVIAN, AND ANN, AND TED, TO BELIEVE IN GOD'S LOVE, IN THE FACE OF WHAT THEY WENT THROUGH?

AND YET, THEIR ACTIONS, THEIR PRESENCE WITH US ON PARLIAMENT HILL, AND THEIR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER, AND FOR US, SPEAK TO HOPE, A HOPE THAT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE.

SIMILARLY, WE HAVE TO WONDER HOW EASY IS IT FOR THOSE WHO ARE AMONG US THIS MORNING, WHO ARE SUFFERING IN WAYS OF WHICH WE ARE UNAWARE, TO ENDURE, AND BE HOPEFUL. THOSE WHO HAVE LOST LOVED ONES RECENTLY, WHO ARE ESTRANGED FROM OTHERS, WHO HAVE FELT THE STING OF ABUSE, DISCRIMINATION, OR OTHER MISTREATMENT. WHO MAY FEEL HOPELESS, DOUBTFUL, UNSURE OF GOD'S LOVE?

WE ARE REMINDED IN OUR TEXT THAT IT IS WAS WHILE WE WERE STILL WEAK, THAT CHRIST DIED FOR US, THE UNGODLY—UNGODLY IN OUR FAILINGS TO BE LIKE GOD, TO LOVE LIKE GOD.

GOD KNEW WE NEEDED CHRIST'S RECONCILING LOVE. AND SO GOD PROVED HIS LOVE FOR US IN THAT WHILE WE STILL WERE SINNERS CHRIST DIED FOR US.

THIS ACT OF LOVE IS ALSO SOMETHING WE WONDER AT: SOMETHING THAT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE. WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US, AND RECONCILED US TO GOD.

MOREOVER, WE HAVE ALL THE MORE REASON TO WONDER, BECAUSE GOD NOT ONLY LOVES US, BUT TRUSTS US TO LEARN FROM CHRIST'S ACT OF RECONCILIATION AND COUNTS ON US TO BE RECONCILERS OURSELVES, AS ST. PAUL TELLS US IN SECOND CORINTHIANS, CHAPTER 5. HE SAYS, WE ARE TO BE CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS, CHRIST'S MINISTERS OF RECONCILIATION.

IN CHRIST, THE IMPOSSIBLE IS ACHIEVED. EVERYTHING OLD HAS PASSED AWAY, EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW. IT IS WONDERFUL! FOR WE HAVE BEEN RECONCILED TO GOD, AND ARE ENTRUSTED WITH THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION, GEORGES ERASMUS, WHO WAS A FORMER NATIONAL CHIEF, AND ALSO THE CO-CHAIR, OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, REMINDS US THAT THIS TEACHING IS SHARED BY ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

ABORIGINAL SPIRITUAL LEADERS, THE ELDERS, ALSO LIFT UP THE PURSUIT OF RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLES AS A FUNDAMENTAL TENET OF ABORIGINAL SPIRITUAL BELIEFS.

MR. ERASMUS WRITES THAT, “OUR ELDERS TEACH US TO REBUKE BOTH THE THOUGHT AND DEEDS OF HATE, FOR ACCORDING TO THE [ANCIENT ABORIGINAL] TEACHINGS IT IS THE WORK OF HUMAN BEINGS TO PROMOTE THROUGH THEIR THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS PEACE AND RESPECT AMONG THE WORLD’S PEOPLES . . . WE ARE TAUGHT THAT THIS IS WHAT MAKES US FULLY HUMAN. . . . HEALING CONSISTS IN REPLACING THE LEGACY OF RACISM WITH A LEGACY OF RECONCILIATION AND PEACE BETWEEN PEOPLES. OUR WELL-BEING DEPENDS UPON THE SUCCESS OF THIS ENDEAVOUR.”

IN THE LEAD UP TO THE APOLOGY CEREMONY, YOU MAY HAVE READ AND HEARD NEWS REPORTS THAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WERE WORRIED ABOUT WHAT WOULD BE SAID IN THE APOLOGY. WOULD IT GO FAR ENOUGH? WOULD IT ACKNOWLEDGE SUFFICIENTLY WHAT THE COUNTRY IS APOLOGIZING FOR?

TIME WILL TELL WHETHER FIRST NATION, INUIT, AND METIS PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT THE APOLOGY, THIS ACT OF RECONCILIATION, BETWEEN BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WAS WHAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE NEEDED PROFOUNDLY TO HEAR.

IT IS WONDERFUL, AND A HOPEFUL SIGN, THAT SO MANY ABORIGINAL PEOPLE HAVE ALREADY STATED THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF AND SATISFACTION WITH THE APOLOGY.

BUT AS IMPORTANT TO THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION WILL BE WHAT FOLLOWS THE APOLOGY. OUR LIFE IN CHRIST DID NOT END IN CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION; INDEED, WE KNOW THAT CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION IS A STARTING POINT FOR NEW LIFE. IT IS A CALL TO US TO LEAD A NEW LIFE, AS SERVANTS OF THE LORD, WHO ARE SENT INTO THE WORLD TO BE A LIGHT FOR THE WORLD, CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS.

WHAT SHALL WE RETURN TO THE LORD FOR HIS BOUNTY TO US? WE WILL PAY OUR VOWS TO THE LORD IN THE PRESENCE OF ALL HIS PEOPLE. O LORD, WE ARE YOUR SERVANTS. WE WILL OFFER TO YOU A THANKSGIVING SACRIFICE . . . PAYING OUR VOWS, IN THE COURTS OF THE HOUSE OF THE LORD, IN YOUR MIDST, O JERUSALEM.

WHAT DO THESE BEAUTIFUL, POETIC WORDS OF OUR PSALM MEAN FOR US IN CANADA TODAY? WHAT IS THIS NEW LIFE WE ARE CALLED TO LEAD, IN THE

CONTEXT OF OUR RELATIONS WITH FIRST NATION, INUIT, AND METIS PEOPLES
IN CANADA?

THE ABORIGINAL LEADERS WHO SPOKE IN RESPONSE TO THE APOLOGY
UNANIMOUSLY SPOKE IN TERMS OF A PASSING AWAY OF THE OLD, OF
EVERYTHING BECOMING NEW, OF THE PROMISE OF RESURRECTION AND NEW
LIFE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WHEN THEY TALKED OF THE APOLOGY AS
PROVIDING A NEW BEGINNING.

CHIEF FONTAINE SAID NEVER AGAIN WILL THIS HOUSE CONSIDER US THE
“INDIAN PROBLEM” JUST FOR BEING WHO WE ARE.

WE DEARLY NEED TO REFRAME OUR PERSPECTION OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH
FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLE. SO MANY WELL MEANING PEOPLE
COME UP TO ME TO ASK, WITH GREAT SINCERITY AND CONCERN, LORI, WHEN
ARE WE GOING TO SOLVE THE ABORIGINAL PROBLEM?

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME NOT TO ANSWER GLIBLY, WITHOUT HONOURING THE
REAL FEELINGS AND CONCERN BEHIND THIS QUESTION, AND YET ONE COULD
START BY SUGGESTING THAT WE’LL SOLVE THE PROBLEM, WHEN WE STOP
THINKING OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AS A PROBLEM. THERE IS A TRUTH WE NEED
TO HEED IN THESE WORDS OF THE NATIONAL CHIEF.

SO WHAT DO WE DO? WHERE DO WE GO FOLLOWING THIS APOLOGY? AND WHAT IS THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA DOING, TO LIVE UP TO ITS OWN PROMISES TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, MADE IN OUR CONFESSION OF 1994 TO GOD, IN WHICH WE ASKED FORGIVENESS FROM ABORIGINAL PEOPLE FOR OUR CO-OPERATION IN THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM AND OTHER PROCESSES OF ASSIMILATION . . . AND SPECIFICALLY, MADE A SOLEMN PROMISE TO WALK TOGETHER WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO FIND HEALING AND WHOLENESS TOGETHER AS GOD'S PEOPLE.

WE HAVE A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY TO CARRY ON THE WORK STARTED WHEN WE MADE OUR OWN FIRST STEPS AT RECONCILIATION, IN OUR CONFESSION OF 1994, AND TO CARRY FORWARD THE SPIRIT OF THE APOLOGY MADE ON OUR BEHALF LAST WEEK, BY OUR GOVERNMENT.

CANADA'S TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION HAS BEGUN ITS WORK THIS MONTH. IF THERE IS ANY REMAINING CONCERN THAT THE APOLOGIES AND CONFESSIONS MADE DID NOT GO FAR ENOUGH IN ACKNOWLEDGING THE FAILINGS IN OUR PAST RELATIONS, AND IN MAKING A COMMITMENT TO WORK TOGETHER TO BUILD A NEW COMMUNITY, THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION CAN HELP US FILL THE GAP.

THIS COMMISSION IS OUR COMMISSION. THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA SIGNED THE AGREEMENT WHICH GIVES THE COMMISSION ITS

MANDATE. WE SIGNED IT, ALONG WITH THE OTHER CHURCHES WHO RAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS. AND WE ARE COMMITTED, AS A CHURCH, TO SUPPORTING ITS WORK IN EVERY WAY WE CAN.

GEORGES ERASMUS EXPLAINS THAT, “WHERE COMMUNITY IS TO BE FORMED, COMMON MEMORY MUST BE CREATED. . . [AND] THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION, IN BEARING WITNESS TO WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE, WILL HELP TO CREATE COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND SHARED HOPE THAT WILL BENEFIT ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN CANADA LONG INTO THE FUTURE.”

CREATE COLLECTIVE MEMORY, AND CREATE SHARED HOPE. IS THIS NOT WONDERFUL? DO WE LAUGH? DOES THIS TASK OF CREATING SHARED MEMORY AND SHARED HOPE BETWEEN ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN CANADA SEEM IMPOSSIBLE? OR DOES IT SEEM LIKE AN IMPOSSIBILITY THAT WE CAN ACHIEVE, WITH GOD’S HELP?

I INVITE YOU TO FOLLOW THE WORK OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION. ONE OF THE NEW COMMISSIONERS, CLAUDETTE DUMONT-SMITH, ADDRESSED OUR GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON JUNE 5TH, AND SPOKE ABOUT A ROLE CHURCHES ALREADY EXCEL AT: OUR ABILITY TO PROVIDE HOSPITALITY TO STRANGERS, TO WELCOME NEW PEOPLE INTO OUR COMMUNITIES, AND MAKE THEM FEEL AT HOME.

LIKE ABRAHAM, WHO WELCOMED THE THREE STRANGERS TO HIS TENT, NOT KNOWING, NOT CARING, WHO WAS AMONG THEM, BUT OFFERING THEM EVERY HOSPITALITY: WATER, BREAD, MADE OF THE CHOICE, THE BEST FLOUR, A CALF, TENDER AND GOOD, CURDS AND MILK – A HEARTY AND WHOLESOME MEAL. REST UNDER THE SHADE OF A TREE. WHO WELCOMED THE STRANGERS AS FRIENDS, AS EQUALS, AS PEOPLE WHOSE TASK IT IS TO LOVE EACH OTHER, AS GOD HAS LOVED US.

CLAUDETTE DUMONT-SMITH INVITES US TO SHOW OUR CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY TO THE COMMISSION AS IT TRAVELS THE COUNTRY, AND TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

SO LET US REACH OUT TO OUR NEIGHBOURS, INVITE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO BE WILL US, TO BREAK BREAD WITH US, AND GET TO KNOW US. LET'S VISIT THEIR COMMUNITIES, TAKE IN THEIR CELEBRATIONS, SUCH AS THEIR SUMMER-TIME POW WOWS—TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY GATHERINGS TO GIVE THANKS TO THE CREATOR.

LET'S LEARN ABOUT OUR NEIGHBOURS, INVITE ABORIGINAL ELDERS, ACADEMICS, BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS TO SPEAK TO US ABOUT THEMSELVES, AND HELP US TO DEVELOP OUR COLLECTIVE MEMORY, THE COMMON MEMORY THAT WILL CREATE A TRUE AND LASTING, AND LOVING COMMUNITY.

THIS IS OUR CALLING. SINCE WE ARE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH, WE HAVE PEACE WITH GOD THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THROUGH WHOM WE HAVE OBTAINED ACCESS TO THIS GRACE IN WHICH WE STAND. BUT MORE THAN THAT, WE EVEN BOAST IN GOD THROUGH WHOM WE HAVE NOW RECEIVED RECONCILIATION.

IS ANYTHING TOO WONDERFUL FOR THE LORD?

IS ANYTHING TOO WONDERFUL?

WHATEVER IS TRUE, WHATEVER IS HONOURABLE, WHATEVER IS JUST, WHATEVER IS PURE, WHATEVER IS PLEASING, WHATEVER IS COMMENDABLE, IF THERE IS ANY EXCELLENCE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING WORTHY OF PRAISE, LET US THINK ABOUT THESE THINGS.

AMEN.

Psalm 146
Acts 2:1-21
Mark 9:38-42, 49-50

WE ARE ONE IN THE SPIRIT

LET US PRAY TOGETHER:

O SPIRIT, GRANT THAT WE MAY NEVER SEEK SO MUCH TO BE CONSOLED,
AS TO CONSOLE, TO BE UNDERSTOOD, AS TO UNDERSTAND, TO BE LOVED,
AS TO LOVE WITH ALL OUR HEARTS, OUR MINDS AND OUR SPIRITS.

AND MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH, AND THE MEDIATIONS OF ALL OF
OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE TO YOU, OH GOD, OUR STRENGTH, OUR
ROCK, AND OUR REDEEMER. AMEN.

I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MUCH IT MEANS FOR ME AS AN ALGONKIAN
WOMAN TO BE PREACHING HERE AT MISTAWASIS MEMORIAL CHURCH.

AS IS THE TRADITION AMONG OUR PEOPLE, AS A MEMBER OF THE
ALGONQUINS OF PIKWAKANAGAN – WHICH, AS _____
MENTIONED WHEN INTRODUCING ME, IS A COMMUNITY IN EASTERN
ONTARIO, ABOUT 150 KILOMETRES NORTHWEST OF OTTAWA – I WANT TO
ACKNOWLEDGE WITH THANKS OUR OPPORTUNITY TO WORSHIP IN THE
TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF THE CREE PEOPLE.

WHAT AN HONOUR TO BE IN A COMMUNITY OF SUCH HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE AS MISTAWASIS: HOME OF CHIEF MISTAWASIS, A LEADER WHO SIGNED TREATY 6, AND WHO IS BURIED RIGHT OUTSIDE THIS CHURCH IN THE CEMETARY. WE ARE ALL TREATY PEOPLE IN CANADA— OURS IS A SACRED RELATIONSHIP, A SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIP. THIS IS A SPECIAL PLACE.

MISTAWASIS TODAY HOLDS A SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA AS BEING THE ONE REMAINING PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION IN A FIRST NATION COMMUNITY. THIS IS TO BE CELEBRATED AND HONOURED. AND THERE'S A STORY HERE TO TELL TO THE REST OF THE CHURCH.

THIS MORNING OUR TEXTS INVITE US TO REFLECT ON THE SUBJECT OF PEOPLES WHO COME TOGETHER TO LIVE IN COMMUNITY, PEOPLES WHO COME FROM VERY DIFFERENT PLACES.

OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST, ALSO OFFERS AN IMPORTANT LESSON TO US ABOUT HOW WE SHOULD RESPOND TO PEOPLE WHO WORSHIP GOD IN WAYS THAT MAY NOT BE FAMILIAR TO US.

LIVING TOGETHER AS DIFFERENT PEOPLES IN COMMUNITY; HOW TO BE FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST WHEN ENCOUNTERING PEOPLES

WHO HAVE A DIFFERENT HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CREATOR.
THESE ARE TERRIBLY IMPORTANT TOPICS IN CANADA TODAY.

MY ROLE AS THE HEALING AND RECONCILIATION ANIMATOR FOR OUR
CHURCH IS TO HELP THE CHURCH REFLECT ON THE HISTORY OF
RELATIONS IN CANADA WITH THE FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS
PEOPLES. TO REFLECT ESPECIALLY ON OUR HISTORY OF MISSION AND
MINISTRY IN CANADA, AND CONSIDER OUR NEED TO REPENT FROM THE
MISTAKES OF THE PAST, NOTABLY DURING THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL
EAR, . . . TO RE-EXAMINE WHAT WE BELIEVE GOD CALLS US TO DO IN
RELATION TO OTHERS, AND TO CONSIDER HOW WE MIGHT WORK
TOGETHER TO BUILD A FUTURE OF LOVING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG ALL
PEOPLES, REMEMBERING CHRIST'S COMMANDMENT THAT WE ARE TO
LOVE ONE AND OTHER AND GOD HAS LOVED US.

OUR TEXT FROM ACTS THIS MORNING IS THE FAMILIAR STORY OF
PENTECOST. A TRADITION HAS DEVELOPED OF LOOKING AT PENTECOST
AS THE CHURCH'S BIRTHDAY. WHY PENTECOST? WHY WAS PENTECOST
SO IMPORTANT TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH, THAT WE
WOULD RECOGNIZE IT AS THE CHURCH'S BIRTHDAY?

PENTECOST IS THE DAY THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST RECEIVED THE HELPER WHO WOULD SUPPORT THEM, WHO SUPPORTS US, IN CARRYING OUT CHRIST'S MINISTRY ON EARTH.

THE HELPER. THE ADVOCATE. THE HOLY SPIRIT. THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH. WHOM THE FATHER SENT TO BE WITH US ALWAYS, AS JESUS PROMISED, TO BE A SPIRIT THAT INSPIRES, TEACHES, AND REMINDS US OF ALL THAT JESUS SAID TO US . . . OF OUR COMMISSION TO LOVE GOD BY KEEPING GOD'S COMMANDMENTS, AND BY WORKING TO BRING ABOUT GOD'S KINGDOM ON EARTH.

THE STORY OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST'S CHURCH AT PENTECOST IS REMARKABLE IN MANY WAYS. FOR ONE THING, THERE ARE AN AWFUL LOT OF PEOPLE PRESENT. WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT ARRIVES IT'S NOT JUST JESUS' DISCIPLES WHO ARE PRESENT—THOUGH THEY ARE THE ONES FIRED UP BY THE SPIRIT TO SPEAK IN TONGUES—RATHER IT'S SIGNIFICANT THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT ARRIVES IN THE PRESENCE OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE COME TO THE HOLY LAND FROM ALL OVER THE ANCIENT WORLD: PARTHIANS, MEDES, EALMITES, MESOPOTAMIANS, JUDEANS, CAPPADOCIANS, ARABS, PEOPLE FROM PONTUS, FROM ASIA, PHYRGIA, PAMPHYLIA, EGYPT, LIBYA, ROME, CRETE.

THIS LONG LIST OF PEOPLES IN THE STORY SURELY MAKES THE POINT THAT THE ARRIVAL OF GOD'S SPIRIT IS SIGNIFICANT FOR ALL OF THEM, FOR ALL PEOPLE FROM ALL PLACES, PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE EARTH. PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT YET BEEN EXPOSED TO CHRIST'S TEACHINGS ARE NEVERTHELESS PRESENT TO WITNESS THE ARRIVAL OF GOD'S SPIRIT.

THIS IS A MESSAGE, AND A CLEAR PICTURE, OF THE INCLUSIVENESS, THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE CHURCH, THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, THAT WAS BORN THAT DAY. THE MESSAGE, THE PICTURE IS UNMISTAKABLE: GOD SEEKS TO BUILD A COMMUNITY OF FAITH, A CHURCH UNIVERSAL, WHERE ALL PEOPLES ARE WELCOME, WHERE EVERYONE WILL HEAR THE WORD OF GOD IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE—NOW ISN'T THAT SIGNIFICANT—THE CHURCH IS TO BE A PLACE WHERE ALL LANGUAGES AND CULTURES ARE GIVEN EQUAL VALUE, AND EQUAL ACCESS TO THE WORD OF GOD.

THE IMAGERY OF THE ARRIVAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS ALSO VERY POWERFUL. IT'S A BIG, SPECTACULAR, TECHNI-COLOUR, SURROUND SOUND , MULTI-DIMENSIONAL, SPECIAL EFFECTS EXTRAVAGANZA THAT THE LIKES OF CECILE B. DEMILLE, GEORGE LUCAS AND STEPHEN SPIELBERG, CAN ONLY DREAM OF CAPTURING ACCURATELY ON FILM.

“AND SUDDENLY THERE CAME A SOUND LIKE THE RUSH OF A VIOLENT WIND, AND IT FILLED THE ENTIRE HOUSE WHERE THEY WERE SITTING.” IT’S NOT JUST ANY WIND, BUT A RUSHING, VIOLENT, ENORMOUS WIND.

“DIVIDED TONGUES, AS OF FIRE, APPEARED AMONG [THE DISCIPLES],” LEAVING ALL AMAZED AND PERPLEXED. AND THE CROWD IS “BEWILDERED,” ASTONISHED, AWE-STRUCK TO HEAR THEIR OWN SEVERAL DOZEN LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY A GROUP OF ORDINARY GALILEAN MEN, THE DISCIPLES.

AND WE ARE REMINDED OF AN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY FROM JOEL ABOUT YOUNG MEN SEEING VISIONS AND OLD MEN DREAMING DREAMS. IT IS A STRANGE DAY, A DAY WHEN THE SUPER-OR, BEYOND-THE-NATURAL OCCURS, THE DAY WHEN THE SPIRIT OF GOD ARRIVES TO LIVE WITH GOD’S PEOPLE ON EARTH, AS A CONSTANT REMINDER OF GOD’S LOVE FOR US, GOD’S HOPES FOR US, AND GOD’S COMMANDMENTS TO US.

GOD. THE CREATOR. THE GREAT MYSTERY. POWERFUL. WONDERFUL. A SOURCE OF AWE AND INSPIRATION.

WIND. FIRE. SPEAKING IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES. SONS AND DAUGHTERS PROPHECYING. YOUNG MEN SEEING VISIONS. OLD MEN DREAMING DREAMS.

WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN WE THINK OF THESE THINGS?

FOR ME, STRANGE AS IT MAY SEEM. I CAN'T HELP THINKING ABOUT A TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL CEREMONY OF WORSHIP TO THE CREATOR: A SWEAT LODGE.

AS A CHRISTIAN, I HAVE NEVETHELESS HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING WELCOMED INTO SWEATLODGES TO LEARN ABOUT THIS TRADITIONAL FORM OF WORSHIP.

NOW I CERTAINLY CAN'T PRETEND TO BE AN EXPERT IN TRADITIONAL FIRST NATION SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS, BUT I CAN SAY WITH CERTAINTY THAT THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM I HAVE GATHERED IN SWEAT LODGES, TO A PERSON, HAVE BEEN PEOPLE GENUINELY SEEKING TO CONNECT WITH GOD, THE GREAT SPIRIT, THE CREATOR, ABOVE ALL THROUGH SINCERE AND HEARTFELT PRAYER, AND WITH A BELIEF THAT GOD'S SPIRIT DOES COMMUNICATE WITH US ON EARTH TODAY.

A SWEAT LODGE IS NOT FOR THE CLAUSTROPHOBIC. FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE UNFAMILIAR WITH A SWEAT LODGE, I'LL NOTE THAT IT'S TYPICALLY A SMALL ROUND TENT, COVERED IN CANVAS, SKINS, OR BLANKETS, AND NOT MORE THAN 2 TO 2 AND A HALF FEET TALL, NOT

EVEN A METER IN HEIGHT. YOU CROUCH DOWN TO GET IN, AND SIT CLOSE TOGETHER AROUND A SMALL PIT INTO WHICH HOT ROCKS ARE PLACED TO GENERATE HEAT, ROCKS CALLED THE GRANDFATHERS.

ROUNDS OF PRAYERS ARE SAID, IN THE DARK, ACCENTUATED WITH SONGS OF PRAISE ACCOMPANIED BY DRUMS AND RATTLES.

PRAYERS ARE SAID IN SEPARATE ROUND FOR CHILDREN, AND THEN FOR WOMEN, AND THEN FOR MEN, AND FINALLY FOR ONESELF. THE TONGUES OF FIRE ARE THERE IN THE FORM OF SMOKE FROM THE HOT ROCKS, THE GRANDFATHERS, AND THE AROMA OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINES BURNT ON THE ROCKS PEVADES THE LODGE -- THE AROMAS OF SWEETGRASS, AND SAGE, TOBACCO AND CEDAR-- WAFT OVER THOSE ASSEMBLED IN PRAYER.

IT IS A PLACE IN WHICH NATIVE ELDERS TELL US THAT YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN CAN SEE VISIONS, AND OLD MEN AND WOMEN DREAM DREAMS. IT IS A PLACE HIGHLY CHARGED WITH INTIMACY AND A SENSE OF COMMUNION WITH OTHERS, AND OF COMMUNION WITH GOD, WITH GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT. IT IS A PLACE OF GREAT MYSTERY.

THIS SENSE OF THE MYSTERIOUS, AND IN PARTICULAR THE SENSE OF BEING CLOSE TO AND IN ONE-ON-ONE COMMUNION WITH GOD'S SPIRIT, IS,

I THINK, SOMETHING MANY MODERN CHRISTIANS HAVE SOME DIFFICULTY EXPRESSING, EVEN IF WE DO HAVE EXPERIENCES THAT CLEARLY REMIND US OF HOW GOD'S SPIRIT REMAINS WITH US TODAY, AS ADVOCATE, AS HELPER, AND AS A VOICE OF TRUTH.

IT'S COUNTER-CULTURAL TO ADMIT TO SUCH SUPER-NATURAL, UNSCIENTIFIC EXPERIENCES, TO ADMIT THAT GOD'S SPIRIT STILL TALKS TO US TODAY.

AND YET, AMONG JESUS' LAST WORDS TO HIS DISCIPLES, FOLLOWING HIS RESURRECTION, WAS HIS PROMISE TO THEM WHEN HE SAID, "I WILL SEND MY SPIRIT TO HELP YOU."

PEACE BE WITH YOU, JESUS SAID. BE NOT AFRAID. I WILL SEND MY SPIRIT TO HELP YOU.

IT IS THIS PROMISE THAT IS FULFILLED ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST, THE BIRTHDAY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, WHEN GOD'S SPIRIT ARRIVES AMONG THE DISCIPLES GATHERED IN COMMUNITY WITH PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE EARTH.

HOW OFTEN HAVE WE FORGOTTEN THE IMAGERY OF THE CHURCH'S BIRTHDAY? THE GATHERING OF ALL OF THESE PEOPLES WHO WERE

PRESENT FOR THE ARRIVAL OF GOD'S SPIRIT, ALL OF WHOM WERE INVITED TO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD, THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE FIRST TIME, IN THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGES?

AND HOW OFTEN WHEN WE THINK ABOUT HOW OTHERS WORSHIP GOD , HOW OTHERS SEEK TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CREATOR, HAVE WE REFLECTED ON JESUS TEACHING IN OUR LESSON FROM THE GOSPEL OF MARK, IN THE NINTH CHAPTER, WHERE WE READ THAT JOHN SAID TO JESUS, 'TEACHER WE SAW SOMEONE CASTING OUT DEMONS IN YOUR NAME, AND WE TRIED TO STOP HIM BECAUSE HE WAS NOT FOLLOWING US. BUT JESUS SAID, 'DO NOT STOP HIM; FOR NO ONE WHO DOES A DEED OF POWER IN MY NAME WILL BE ABLE SOON AFTERWARD TO SPEAK EVIL OF ME. WHOEVER IS NOT AGAINST US IS FOR US.'

WHEN I READ THAT: I SAT UP THINKING THIS MAY BE A KEY TEXT FOR HOW WE APPROACH MISSION, PARTICULARLY AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE FAITH IN GOD, PEOPLE WHO DO DEEDS OF POWER IN GOD'S NAME, BUT WHO EXPRESS THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IN A MANNER THAT IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM OUR OWN, ONE THAT WOULD NOT LOOK CHRISTIAN TO US.

MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE MY ANCESTORS DID NOT WORSHIP SOMEONE CALLED "JESUS," THOUGH THEY WORSHIPPED ONE GOD, THE CREATOR,

THAT IT SEEMS LOGICAL TO ME THAT JESUS IS SAYING TO THOSE OF US WHO CALL OURSELVES CHRISTIANS, WHO ARE TRYING TO FOLLOW CHRIST LIKE HIS DISCIPLES, THAT HE'S TELLING US TO BE CAREFUL TO NOT JUMP ALL OVER PEOPLE WHO WORSHIP GOD DIFFERENTLY; THEY ARE NOT SPEAKING EVIL OF JESUS, IF THEY ARE DOING GOOD BUT PERHAPS NOT DOING SO, NOT WORSHIPPING GOD QUITE THE WAY WE DO. IT'S POSSIBLE, THAT IN A WAY THEY MAY NOT YET ACKNOWLEDGE, THEY ARE IN FACT DOING DEEDS OF POWER IN CHRIST'S NAME. AS JESUS SAID, "WHOEVER IS NOT AGAINST US, IS FOR US."

LET ME BE CLEAR. I AM NOT SAYING THAT AS CHRISTIANS WE SHOULD NOT DO EVERYTHING IN OUR POWER TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRIST. BUT I THINK THE GOOD NEWS TO BE FOUND IN THIS PASSAGE IS THAT CHRIST TELLS US TO BE GENTLE, TO BE HUMBLE, TO BE PEACEABLE AND WILLING TO YIELD WHEN WE ENCOUNTER OTHERS WHO WORSHIP HIM IN WAYS WE DO NOT IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZE.

NO LESS A THEOLOGIAN THAN THE RIGHT REV. MARK MACDONALD, THE FIRST NATIONAL INDIGENOUS BISHOP OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA, HAS SAID THAT ALL PEOPLES HAVE A HISTORY WITH GOD. ALL PEOPLES HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CREATOR.

DOES THIS NOT MAKE SENSE? DO WE NOT BELIEVE THAT GOD LOVES ALL PEOPLE AS HIMSELF? THAT GOD CREATED ALL PEOPLE, ALL PEOPLE, IN GOD'S IMAGE?

AS CHRISTIANS, LIKE THE DISCIPLES, WE BELIEVE AND I BELIEVE THAT WE HAVE A SPECIAL COMMISSION TO SHARE THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, NOT BECAUSE WE ARE GREATER THAN OTHER PEOPLES, BUT BECAUSE BY GOD'S GRACE WE HAVE HEARD THE GOOD NEWS, AND LIKE CHRIST, OUT OF LOVE AND A DESIRE TO BE OF SERVICE TO OTHERS, WE WANT TO SHARE WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED, NOT FOR OUR OWN GLORY, BUT TO THE GLORY OF GOD.

THIS COMMISSION IS SPELLED OUT CLEARLY IN SECOND CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 5 WHERE WE READ THAT , IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST THERE IS A NEW CREATION. EVERYTHING OLD HAS PASSED AWAY. SEE EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW. ALL THIS IS FROM GOD WHO RECONCILED US TO HIMSELF THROUGH CHRIST, AND HAS GIVEN US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.

IN CHRIST GOD WAS RECONCILING THE WORLD TO HIMSELF, NOT COUNTING OUR TRESPASSES AGAINST US, AND ENTRUSTING THE MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION TO US. SO WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, SINCE GOD IS MAKING HIS APPEAL THROUGH US.

WOW! I FIND THIS TO BE ONE OF THE MOST PROFOUNDLY INSPIRING AND HOPEFUL PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE. GOD TRUSTS US TO BE CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS.

THIS IS THE GOOD NEWS OF THE RESURRECTION. GOD TRUSTS US, LOVES US THROUGH ALL OUR FAILINGS, BECAUSE WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN, AND GOD BELIEVES IN OUR ABILITY TO GET THINGS RIGHT. AND WHAT ARE WE CALLED TO DO BUT TO DO WHAT CHRIST DID TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS OURSELVES.

AND WHERE LOVE HAS BROKEN DOWN BETWEEN PEOPLES, WHERE RELATIONSHIPS ARE STRAINED OR BROKEN, WHETHER BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS, AMONG BRANCHES OF A FAMILY, WITHIN COMMUNITIES, OR BETWEEN NATIONS WE ARE CALLED TO BE RECONCILERS.

IN 1994, RESPONDING TO THIS CALL, AND REFLECTING ON THE HISTORY OF OUR MINISTRY AND MISSION AMONG THE FIRST PEOPLES OF CANADA, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA MADE A CONFESSION TO GOD.

WE SAID THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT . . . THE HOLY SPIRIT, SPEAKING TO US THROUGH SCRIPTURE, AND THROUGH THE TESTIMONY OF OTHERS,

NOTABLY THROUGH THE WITNESS OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE THEMSELVES,
WE WERE CALLED US TO CONFESSION.

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT STATEMENTS IN THAT CONFESSION WAS
ONE OF HUMILITY: WHICH ACKNOWLEDGED THAT WE MUST CONTINUE
TO EXAMINE AND RE-EXAMINE OUR APPROACH TO MISSION NOT OUT OF
ANY SENSE THAT WE OURSELVES WOULD HAVE DONE ANYTHING
DIFFERENT THAN OUR FOREBEARS HAD WE LIVED IN THE SAME
CIRCUMSTANCES.

AS AN ACT OF REPENTANCE, OUR CONFESSION ACKNOWLEDGED THE
WRONGS TOO DEEP FOR TELLING COMMITTED AGAINST FIRST PEOPLES
OUT OF OUR BELIEF THAT “IF THEY COULD BE LIKE US, IF THEY COULD
THINK LIKE US, TALK LIKE US, WORSHIP LIKE US, SING LIKE US, AND
WORK LIKE US, THEY WOULD KNOW GOD AND THEREFORE WOULD HAVE
LIFE ABUNDANT.”

WE SAID THAT “IN OUR CULTURAL ARROGANCE WE HAVE BEEN BLIND TO
THE WAYS IN WHICH OUR OWN UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL HAS
BEEN CULTURALLY CONDITIONED, AND [HAVE] . . . DEMANDED MORE OF
THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE THAN THE GOSPEL REQUIRES.”

OVER THE CENTURIES WE LOST SIGHT OF THE CHURCH'S FIRST BIRTHDAY: WE LOST SIGHT OF THE IMAGE OF THE DISCIPLES, CHRIST'S FIRST AMBASSADORS, REACHING OUT TO ALL PEOPLES IN THE LANGUAGES OF THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH—NOT SEEKING TO TURN OTHERS INTO CHRISTIANS BY MAKING THEM LEARN ARAMAIC, OR HEBREW, BUT TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL IN WAYS, IN LANGUAGES, THAT DID NOT NEED TO BE TRANSLATED TO OTHERS.

SOMEHOW WE CHRISTIANS LOST SIGHT OF THE IDEA THAT EVANGELISM, CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY, IS ABOUT CHRIST, IT'S ABOUT GOD. IT'S NOT ABOUT US, AND OUR LANGUAGES, AND CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS. GOD LOVES ALL LANGUAGES, ALL CUSTOMS, AND ALL TRADITIONS BECAUSE GOD LOVES ALL PEOPLES.

WHERE IS GOD'S SPIRIT LEADING US TODAY?

HOW CAN WE BE FAITHFUL AMBASSADORS OF CHRIST HERE IN CANADA, IN SASKATCHEWAN, AS MEMBERS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH?

THINKING ABOUT THE BROKENNESS, THE MISUNDERSTANDING, THE LACK OF KNOWLEDGE THAT IS STILL SO PREVALENT IN OUR RELATIONSHIP AS ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, THERE IS A LOT FOR US TO DO TO BRING ABOUT HEALING AND RECONCILIATION.

WE HAVE CHRIST'S EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW. OUR LORD WALKED THE JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION BEFORE US. WE HAVE HEARD HOW CHRIST INVITED THOSE WHO WERE IGNORED AND EXCLUDED BY OTHERS TO BE WITH HIM, TO TALK TO HIM, TO GET TO KNOW HIM, TO BREAK BREAD WITH HIM, TO SHARE WITH HIM. IT'S THAT SIMPLE, AND THAT POWERFUL.

MUCH IS HAPPENING ALREADY IN SASKATCHEWAN, AND THE PRESENCE OF SO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE, WHO ARE HERE TODAY REPRESENTING CHURCHES FROM THROUGHOUT THE PROVINCE, SPEAKS TO A DESIRE TO BUILD A NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FIRST NATIONS AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLES.

AFTER SPENDING A WEEKEND WITH THESE YOUNG ADULTS, I COME AWAY FEELING CONFIDENT THAT THE FUTURE OF OUR CHURCH IS BRIGHT INDEED. AND MY HOPE IS THAT YOU AT MISTAWASIS WILL GET TO KNOW THEM WELL.

I WONDER HOW THE COMMUNITY OF MISTAWASIS MIGHT LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS WORK. I SAID EARLIER THAT THERE IS A RICH HISTORY HERE AND A SPECIAL STORY OF A CHURCH COMMUNITY THAT OTHERS IN CANADA COULD LEARN A LOT FROM, A STORY THAT WOULD BE REALLY INTERESTING TO HEAR. HOW MIGHT THAT STORY BE TOLD?

HOW CAN WE BUILD ON THE PARTNERSHIPS THAT ALREADY HAVE BEEN MADE BETWEEN CHURCHES AND THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY, SUCH AS IN PRINCE ALBERT, IN SASKATOON, AND ELSEWHERE.

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT EACH OTHER BETTER AS WE GROW IN FAITH, ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TOGETHER. HOW MIGHT WE LEARN TOGETHER? WORK TOGETHER? HAVE MORE FUN TOGETHER?

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT EACH OTHER AS CANADA MAKES A SIGNIFICANT EFFORT TO EXAMINE ITS HISTORY THROUGH THE WORK OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION? THIS IS THE CHURCH'S COMMISSION. WE SIGNED THE AGREEMENT WHICH ESTABLISHED THE COMMISSION, ALONG WITH ALL THE OTHER CHURCHES THAT RAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS IN CANADA.

THE COMMISSION WILL BE INVITING COMMUNITIES TO ORGANIZE EVENTS THAT REFLECT ON THE PAST AND LOOK FORWARD TO A NEW AND HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIP, A RELATIONSHIP OF MUTUAL RESPECT AND LOVE BETWEEN NEIGHBOURS, BETWEEN PEOPLES, ALL THE PEOPLES WHO NOW CALL CANADA HOME.

WHERE IS GOD'S SPIRIT LEADING US? GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT. OUR HELPER.
OUR ADVOCATE. THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST WHO IS WITH US ALWAYS, TO THE
END OF THE AGE. THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN WHOM NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE.

GLORY BE TO GOD THE FATHER. GLORY BE TO GOD THE SON. GLORY BE
TO GOD THE SPIRIT. GOD ALMIGHTY. THREE-IN-ONE! GLORY, GLORY,
GLORY, GLORY, GLORY WHILE ETERNAL AGES RUN.

AMEN.