

A participatory sermon: A Prayer for Reconciliation¹
Sermon for May 31, 2015 a day to mark the close of the truth and reconciliation commission in Canada

Prayer of Illumination

All: As we hear and read the Scripture, O God, open our hearts and minds to discover your Word for us today, and help us interpret and translate that word into action every day. Amen.

In light of the closing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Ottawa this weekend today I will talk about Reconciliation.

In simple Merriam Webster terms, reconciliation is the act of causing two people or groups to become friendly again after an argument or disagreement.

Slide 1 of Venn Diagram – Reconciliation.

When I read that definition and applied it to the process of reconciliation that we hope and pray for between settler and indigenous people.

I said to myself, “no, not good enough,”

because what happened between settlers and indigenous folks was so much more than an argument or a disagreement.

Those terms apply to parties with equal power in a relationship

Slide 2

Settlers and indigenous persons have been living in and experiencing the world from different positions of power and privilege for generations.

Fortunately we have more than the dictionary to help us understand reconciliation. Our scriptures lead us into a deeper appreciation for what reconciliation can be if we have the eyes and ears and hearts to see.

A Children’s Prayer

(This can be done as a ‘repeat after me’ prayer)

God, reconciliation is a big word,

Help me to always listen with my heart, as well as my ears.

Help me to see with my heart, as well as my eyes.

Help me to speak the truth, and to listen for the truth

And then I will be on the path towards reconciliation. Amen

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<http://www.kairoscanada.org/events/time4reconciliation/attachment/500x10-white-bar/>

As Christians we talk often about the reconciling work of Christ and while this is true, essential and important, this morning I would like us to examine Isaiah 6 and see already there a model and foundation for God's powerful work of Salvation and Reconciliation.

Slide 3

The model in Isaiah's vision that Jeff read for us includes four parts. First, God reveals God's magnificence to Isaiah and in that vision Isaiah has a powerful encounter with the Holy. Second, The Seraphs respond with praise. and Isaiah responds with confession. Third, God offers forgiveness symbolized by a burning coal that touches Isaiah's lips. And Fourth, when God asked, "Whom will I send and who will go for us?" Isaiah volunteered with, "Here am I, send me"

And what was that message to that God had for the people? The rest of chapter 6 tells us.

If the people would
look and see with their eyes
hear and listen with their ears
comprehend with their minds and hearts
they could turn and be healed.

The way it is phrased in this passage, God tells Isaiah that all of this is not likely to happen.

Isaiah asks, "How long? How long will it be before the people will turn and be healed?"

And God replies,
"The land will be desolate,
houses will be empty,
the people will be sent away
and everything will be scorched and desolate
before anyone turns for healing.

Does this also need to be true for our time? I pray not.

In this chapter in Isaiah, the holy seed of hope will be found in the stump of the terebinth or oak that survives even though it has been cut down. We have come to understand that the holy seed of hope has come to us in the reconciling work of Jesus.

But already Isaiah's vision offers a model of how to
look and actually see with our eyes
hear and actually listen with our ears
and comprehend with our minds and our hearts that we need to turn and be healed
so that the reconciliation of all peoples can take place.

In light of the Truth and Reconciliation process in Canada,
what is it that we are being asked to see and hear and comprehend?
First, we have been asked to recognize the profound difference in power and
privilege between Settlers and Indigenous.
and recognize the wrongs that have been committed.

In four previous Sundays we tried to acknowledge those differences by naming who
we are and where we are.

Today I want to allow the words of Aaron Paquette (an indigenous artist who lives
in Edmonton)

to describe for us one more time what so many of our indigenous sisters and
brothers experienced.

This following reflection comes from his public Facebook page:

The stated aim was to "kill the Indian in the child"...

*For generations the children in my family have been under attack, despised. More
recently in the form of being stolen from their home and either put in outside/foster
care or sent to Residential School.*

*The Schools were often many tens of miles away from home, sometimes further. That
way it was difficult for parents to visit.*

*These Institutions were generally run by religious organizations (Anglican, Catholic,
United, and Presbyterians) on behalf of the Canadian Government, officially starting in
the 1840's.*

Approximately 150,000 children went to Residential School.

*They say that 50,000 of them died there or in trying to escape. Many others were
starved or exposed to disease or cut into for "medical research".*

*At school, they were taught that their grandparents were evil devil worshipers and
that their language was the Devil's Tongue. If they spoke anything other than English,
the children were punished.*

*The first thing that happened to them upon arrival was the cutting off of their braids.
Most of the children were abused physically, all emotionally and many sexually.*

*This from the people who were indoctrinating them in Christianity and the Word of
God's Love.*

The last Residential School closed in 1996. Not 1896...1996.

The stated aim was to "kill the Indian in the child".

So imagine, if you will, what kind of damaged person emerged from a place like that.

*They have lost their culture, their language, their sense of self worth and their grip on
proper behaviour.*

Now imagine them trying to piece a life back together in world that despises them for

their skin, their family, their culture, their very existence.

Now imagine their feelings when their own children are taken away, and they know what is happening to them, but they can't do anything about it. Many tried and were arrested.

A shadow of shame and violence descended and for generations no one talked about their experiences. They hid their pain in alcohol. They perpetuated their own abuses. Some didn't. Some found healing again in their culture. A culture that the government was actively attempting to stamp out, that had to be kept secret.

I am the first generation of my family that wasn't taken from my home.

Imagine that.

The story is harsh but the TRC has been one of our opportunities to hear the story.

So where are we as a community in the model as proposed in chapter 6 of Isaiah? Each Sunday we come here to worship and if God grants it to be so we may encounter the Holy.

We build into our services responses of praise for God's holiness and sometimes we have opportunities to confess the wrongs that we have committed. As part of the model of reconciliation found in Isaiah, let us take the next step and pray this prayer of confession together. May it be for us part of our journey along the path of reconciliation in these matters.

Prayer of Confession

Leader: God, how often have we listened but have not heard, looked but have not seen the pain our indigenous sisters and brothers have experienced. How often have we felt paralyzed not knowing how to respond?

All: We confess that we do not always see or hear with our hearts. We confess that we do not always act with your justice.

Leader: We sometimes feel that we were not there when the children were taken from their parents and sent away to school. For most, our parents were not there nor were our grandparents.

All: We confess that sometimes we don't see why we are being held to account for the actions of people that we did not know and, so long ago.

Leader: But, we are the bearers of many blessings of our ancestors of blood or faith. Therefore, we must also bear their burdens and responsibilities. The last Residential School closed in 1996, that was in our time and we did not know the truth.

All: We apologize for the actions of our country and our churches in running Indian Residential Schools. We seek your forgiveness for what has been done to your children. We seek acceptance of our commitment to justice and our desire to walk towards reconciliation.

We ask for your grace to heal all of us.

Amen.

Hear these words of Assurance

Leader: Holy, Merciful and Righteous God

Holy One, your love is higher than the starry heavens.

Merciful One, your purifying kindness is deeper than the ocean.

Righteous One, heal and transform us by your love and kindness into energy for

speaking the truth and reconciling with one another.
Amen.

While in this sermon I want to illustrate a powerful model towards that salvation and reconciliation that God intends for us
It is not for me to say what that model must look like for our indigenous sisters and brothers.

Slide 4

For many it includes encounters with the Holy as well
and the strength that comes with walking with Christ who is always present with the hungry and thirsty, the naked and the imprisoned – with the vulnerable and powerless ones.

But Aaron Paquette as an indigenous person is free to say what that might look like for himself and his people – and he says it this way.

All people have suffered and come from a long line of suffering.

For some of us it is sickness, in any of its forms, for others it's secrets or loss.

We are born into suffering and grow in it. It shapes us.

If we only go with the flow, we become lost in it.

But it doesn't have to be that way. We can navigate these waters, these tears.

Suffering makes us strong if we let it. Even as the body weakens, the spirit can become unstoppable.

If your body is whole, pushing it can build muscle and endurance. The same truth is reflected in spirit.

But we need to see a path. A way. When we are lost in darkness it feels as if there is no choice that could lead to something better. We get stuck in the tangles of the woods, the forest of our mind.

That's when we need to stop struggling, stop recounting the horrors of our journey and simply rise above it.

To "get away from it all" we often watch tv or have a drink or play video games...check Facebook, lol.

But that activity only makes us sleep. Our soul shuts down and we become numb. Zombies.

I have found that a creative state, a prayerful state, a meditative state...these have the same effect of allowing us to shed our stress. But instead of going numb, we do the opposite. We become alive.

Learn to dream while awake and aware

Not in the sense of a plan or accelerated thoughts, but in a peaceful state that allows you to see. The shadows are banished.

It takes practice. It takes time. It takes a willingness to be calm, slow down, become still.

In Cree culture, we have many methods to attain this state. It's embedded in the culture itself. The strongest elements of Cree spirituality and well being demand that you put the world aside and become present.

*The same thing is found in Indigenous cultures across the Americas and the world.
It's how we survived the centuries of attempted genocide. How we laugh when things
are darkest.*

It's what heals the people and gives them strength.

*It's how we continue to offer peace, to talk and find solutions, to love those who would
destroy us.*

It's a gift left to us from our ancestors, preserved through the generations.

The fundamental teachings are what will save the world.

Words & Art: Aaron Paquette

like this page:

<http://www.facebook.com/AaronPaquetteArt>

What would it mean for we as Christians to claim our own fundamental teachings,
Knowledge of the Holiness of God that leads to a response of praise and confession.
Opportunity to receive purifying forgiveness from this Holy and merciful God
so that we are empowered to volunteer with a "Here am I " when God asks again and
again, "who will go?"

And maybe most difficult of all

we can learn from Christ the ultimate lesson of relinquishing power and privilege so
that like Christ we will live in solidarity with those who have little or none.

Slide 5

When we claim and live these teachings, Christ's reconciling power can heal and
transform us so that our ears and eyes and hearts can hear and see and comprehend
our kinship with all others in our beautiful and God-given diversity as children of
God.

Let us now pray this prayer that you will notice in the note at the bottom was
prayed at the beginning of the TRC, let us pray it again at the end of the formal
process of the TRC so we acknowledge that our Holy God's work of healing,
transforming and reconciling is not done and that we are and will be part of what is
yet to be.

Remembering the Children

God of our Ancestors,
who holds the spirits of our grandmothers and grandfathers
and the spirits of our grandchildren,
Remembering the Children,
we now pledge ourselves to speak the Truth,
and with our hearts and our souls
to act upon the Truth we have heard
of the injustices lived,
of the sufferings inflicted,
of the tears cried,
of the misguided intentions imposed,

and of the power of prejudice and racism
which were allowed to smother the sounds and laughter of the forgotten children.
Hear our cries of lament
for what was allowed to happen,
and for what will never be.
In speaking and hearing and acting upon the Truth may we as individuals and as a
nation meet the hope of a new beginning.
Great Creator God
who desires that all creation live in harmony and peace,
Remembering the Children
we dare to dream of a Path of Reconciliation
where apology from the heart leads to healing of the heart
and the chance of restoring the circle,
where justice walks with all,
where respect leads to true partnership, and
where the power to change comes from each heart.
Hear our prayer of hope,
and guide us and this country of Canada
on a new and different path.

*(by Rev. Lillian Roberts, for the launch of the Church Leaders Tour which marked the
original launch of the TRC)*