

“Two- Eyed Seeing” – July 25th – Indigenous Sunday

The United Church usually celebrates Indigenous Sunday on June 20th, but here at Grace we decided to delay it because we were hoping to have a guest speaker today. We did not know then that there would be tragic discoveries at several residential schools. Our need to acknowledge our country’s treatment of our Indigenous people, has suddenly been thrust into the forefront of our consciousness.

We are perhaps now more in a state of grieving rather than celebration.

But I think we do also need to pause and celebrate the richness of the Indigenous culture. We can learn so much from:

- their understanding of the Creator
- their respect for the environment
- their seven grandfather teachings of Spiritual gifts
- their stories of wisdom
- their prayers and rituals

When we do not take time to learn about these things, we create a division between ‘us and them’.

Mi,kmaq elder, Albert Marshall, created a term called ‘Two Eyed Seeing.’ It means to be willing and able to look at situations from two perspectives, or two eyes.

One eye looks through the lens of the Indigenous culture, their people, their stories, their understanding.

The other eye looks through the lens of the dominant western culture.

When you look at a situation through Two Eyed Seeing, you allow space for the two cultures to come together, using the best of both worldviews to aid understanding and solve problems.

It’s a method that has been used in medicine, environmental studies, fisheries, education and more.

Mi’kmaq Elder Albert Marshall writes:

“Two-Eyed Seeing is a guiding principle for intercultural collaboration providing the gift of multiple perspectives. It encourages the realization that beneficial outcomes are much more likely in any given situation when we are willing to bring two or more perspectives into play,”

I think in the church, we need to be more open to Two Eyed Seeing.

We need to let go of our suspicions and our tightly held traditions, and be open to learning from Indigenous Spirituality.

I know that some of the songs, and the rituals that I have shared with you today may have seemed out of place in a ‘typical service’. But, I hope that you were open to listening to them.

Healing and reconciliation for the events of the past, can only begin when our minds and hearts are open to listening to each other.

Our scripture today reminds us of that.

Paul tells the Ephesians that there is no barrier between Gentiles and Jews. He writes:

“Christ has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14)

He reminds them that the early Christian church was built on the cornerstone of Christ, who through his death ended hostility, and joined all people as one in God’s Spirit.

The early church, and our church today, are encouraged to

“be built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:21)

If we are to live by God’s Spirit.

If we are to follow Christ’s command to love our brothers and sisters.

If we are to follow Paul’s teachings on how the Church should unite all people with the Spirit of God – then we must look with Two Eyed Seeing.

As we figure out how we move forward during this time of horrific discoveries, we must begin by allowing space to listen to the stories of pain.

So, let us start today by listening to a statement from the Honorable Murray Sinclair, who was a former Canadian Senator and chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As an Ojibway elder, and Indigenous Lawyer, he shared these words on June 1st.

(Statement from Honorable Murray Sinclair – June 1st, 2021

<https://www.facebook.com/Sincmurr1951/videos/189562956275355/>)

Transcript:

I wanted to take the opportunity to speak to you regarding the situation that has come to the public’s eye about the discovery of bodies at the residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada.

When I was asked to chair the Truth & Reconciliation Commission, I thought that I had a pretty good idea of what to expect. Discovering what was going on in the schools, I thought, would be accomplished by listening to what the survivors told us and recording their stories. I undertook that part of the work openly and willingly, with what I thought was a good understanding of what they were going to tell us.

But the stories from the survivors proved to be horrendous. One of the most common stories that we heard were from survivors who talked about the children who died in the schools and whose deaths they witnessed. Just as often, we heard about the loneliness and separation from their family - how they lost so much.

One aspect of residential schools that really proved to be quite shocking to me personally, was the stories that we began to gather of the children who died in the schools. Of the children who died, sometimes deliberately, it was at the hands of others who were there, and in such large

numbers.

Survivors talked about children who suddenly went missing. Some talked about children who went missing into mass burial sites. Some survivors talked about infants who were born to young girls at the residential schools, infants who had been fathered by priests, were taken away from them and deliberately killed - sometimes thrown into furnaces, we were told.

We had no expectation that this would be a part of the work we were doing. We asked the government to allow us to conduct a fuller inquiry to that part of the work of the TRC, to explore that on behalf of the survivors and Canadian public. We submitted a proposal, as it was not within the mandate of the TRC, and that request was denied. So largely we did what we could, but it was not anywhere near what we needed to investigate. Now we are seeing evidence of the large number of children who died.

We know there are lots of sites similar to Kamloops that are going to come to light in the future. We need to begin to prepare ourselves for that.

Those that are survivors and intergenerational survivors need to understand that this information is important for all of Canada to understand the magnitude of the truth of this experience.

Since the revelation of what has happened at Kamloops has come to light, I have been inundated with calls from Survivors. Hundreds of calls, often just to cry. I can hear not only the pain and the anguish, but also the anger that no one believed the stories they had told. I can also hear their sense that they have lost some hope that maybe those children that hadn't returned might still be found. They now know that may not happen.

My heart goes out to the Survivors, the children and families of Survivors who never made it back. I know this is a hard time. But we must persevere in our investigation that we must know what happened at these schools. We need to ensure that we put in place healing programs and foundations that will help survivors to gather and share their memories and stories.

I pray for you all and hope that you can find a way to continue on in a good and healthy way. Miigwech.

And, so as we respond, to this statement, let us join together in saying aloud the apology that was made by the United Church to our Indigenous people in 1986. And as we say these words together, let us renew our promise to walk together in the Spirit of Christ.

The 1986 Apology to Indigenous People, from General Council, United Church of Canada

Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured. We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality. We confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ. We imposed our civilization as a condition of accepting the gospel. We tried to make you be like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result, you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we are meant by God to be. We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the Spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed.