

## 2021 09 26 – Truth and Reconciliation

### James 5:13-20 (The Inclusive Bible)

Today's scripture reading is taken from a letter that the apostle James wrote to the early churches that were spread around the Mediterranean Sea. In this letter he stressed the importance of prayer in the lives of these congregations:

Are any of you in trouble? Then pray...  
Are any of you sick? Then call for the elders of the church,  
and have them pray...  
pray for one another, that you may be healed.

Prayer is an important element in healing of all kinds: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Prayer is also an important element in the healing of relationships, a process that we call reconciliation. And, of course, prayer is a key element in reconciliation with our Indigenous peoples. But before we go any further, we need to ask ourselves: Why is this true? What is so important about prayer?

Today's scripture reading might give you the impression that we pray because we expect God to fix things for us. That our prayers somehow convince God to stop or start the rain, to cure an illness or even to fix a difficult relationship. But I don't believe in a "fix-it" God. I believe in a God that is the essence of Love.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes, a Methodist minister in the United States, put it this way:

Praying isn't asking for stuff, even very good stuff.  
It's paying attention to God.  
We hold our hopes, fears and desires  
in the light of God's love, so, yes, we say what we want.  
But we listen more deeply to what we really want,  
and what we want more than that.

And mostly we listen for what God wants—  
what God is already doing,  
here even in our unmet needs, our “unanswered” prayers.

Love is an energy like electricity, a force field like gravity.  
When we give ourselves to God  
we tune ourselves to love,  
we harmonize with the oneness of all things  
(we are one in the Spirit),  
we add our love to God's.  
We increase the power of love in the world.  
That doesn't fix things. But it changes them.

The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective  
because it puts us in tune with love,  
so miracles can happen, even if just in us.

So what has all this got to do with Truth and Reconciliation? Everything. You see, in order to be reconciled with our Indigenous neighbours, first we have to do our own work, first we have to heal ourselves, first we have to pray. While the four colours were being braided this morning we did just that. We prayed for the ability to:

recognize what we must be a part of:  
Loving and just relationships  
Saying “sorry” ... and actively meaning it.

Sometimes when we pray, when we listen to that still small voice within us, what we discover is our need to listen and to learn. That is certainly the case with the work of Truth and Reconciliation. The first part of that task is to know “the truth.” The good news is, that thanks to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we now have lots of information about the history of colonization and its impact on our Indigenous neighbours. We now have lots of information about what happened in residential schools. We now have lots of information about the impact those schools had on generations of Indigenous people. That

information is available in books, in courses and it's available online. To find the truth, I would recommend starting on the website of the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#). Go to the section called *Reports*. There you will find not just the reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but historic documents that give first hand information about treaties, residential schools and our government's plan to "[get rid of the Indian problem](#)."

Once our church leaders had a grasp of what really happened, the General Council of the United Church of Canada apologized. In 1986 we apologized for the cultural genocide that we were a part of and in 1998 we apologized for the incredible abuses that took place in our residential schools. Twenty-three years later, we are still working towards true reconciliation.

Our Indigenous neighbours have told us what reconciliation means to them. They have provided us with a 200 page document called *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth & Reconciliation*. In this book they give an outline of the history and legacy of colonization and then a description of what reconciliation means to them. This second part of this book begins with the following words:

To the Commission, "reconciliation" is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour.

We are not there yet. The relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is not a mutually respectful one. But, we believe we can get there, and we believe we can maintain it. Our ambition is to show how we can do that.

They are talking about the type of relationship that is represented by the braid that we created this morning. A braid that indicates a deeply connected and mutual relationship. A relationship where all people are respected, different ways of being are embraced and people's voices are heard. The Commission's chapter on reconciliation is filled with people's voices—telling the stories that were shared during the truth and reconciliation commission. Reconciliation begins with listening.

But one of the most important reports on that website is the one filled with the Commission's 94 Calls to Action. These 94 calls are directed at government organizations (federal, provincial, municipal), the churches, educational institutions and to individuals. In many areas work has started, but there is so much left to do. It is our role to understand these calls to action and to make sure that our church, our governments and our community are all faithfully working towards reconciliation. [https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

The latest step from our federal government is the creation of a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30<sup>th</sup>. Our Church Council has already stated that the staff of this congregation will have that day off to recognize this important work. Tomorrow I will be attending a flag raising at the flag court on Central Avenue. The city will adding two flags to the others in the court: The

Treaty Four Flag and the flag of the Metis Nation. These flags will remain permanently to recognize the Indigenous People's on whose land we reside.

There are also other events happening in Swift Current this week and the United Church has organized a webinar on Wednesday and a prayer vigil for Thursday afternoon. If you can, please take some time from your week to attend at least one of these events. I especially recommend the prayer vigil at 3pm on Thursday.

In his letter, James wrote: "So confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." It is through our connection with the Holy Mystery, the Essence of Love that true healing takes place within us. We pray that we may be filled with sacred love. We pray that we may discover our place in this important work of truth and reconciliation. We pray so that miracles can happen, even if just in us.

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