

## **2025 02 02 – “Unsuitable” Settlers**

**Scripture:** Luke 4:21-30 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

“Today in your hearing this scripture passage is fulfilled.” These are the words that Jesus speaks as he sits down to teach in the synagogue in Nazareth. Some of you will remember that these were also the words that ended last Sunday’s scripture reading. Jesus has just announced to his family and his neighbours that he is the Messiah, the one they have been waiting for. Jesus has just announced that his mission and ministry is one of justice and healing and freedom.

As Jesus goes on to speak, his neighbours are impressed. They can’t believe their eyes and their ears. They “marvel at the eloquence of the words on Jesus’ lips” and they say, “Surely this isn’t Mary and Joseph’s son!” As Jesus goes on to point out, “the truth is, prophets never gain acceptance in their hometowns,” It is difficult to take that leap from the boy to the man, from the student to the teacher, from your neighbour’s kid to the one you’ve been waiting for.

But the reality is that Jesus’ neighbours and family have already heard about his teaching prowess and his ability to heal and they are kind of expecting that Jesus is going to stay awhile in his home town. They are expecting that since he is “theirs”, they will get first-dibs at his newly-discovered gifts and abilities.

But Jesus’ plan is a different one. He explains to the crowd in the synagogue that they will have to share him with others. And he uses a couple of examples from

their own Hebrew scriptures. Jesus reminds them of the time of famine when the prophet Elijah left his fellow Israelites and went to help a widow in a neighbouring country. And the time when leprosy was wide spread and Elisha, another prophet, cured only Naaman, a Syrian.

The scripture reading tells us that Jesus' neighbours rose up and dragged Jesus out of town, leading him to the brow of the hill on which the city was built, with the intention of hurling him over the edge." Why would they do that? Well, this particular translation suggests that the people in the synagogue did this because they were "filled with indignation." Now I have to believe, because of the violence of their actions, that their feelings were a little stronger than "indignation." Other translations use words like "rage," "furious," or "seething with anger." These people couldn't believe that their Jesus, this man from their hometown was going to share his God-given gifts with outsiders, aliens, people with different religions, cultures and even skin tones. They felt shafted, they felt like they were being treated unfairly. They believed that they were the ones who should be benefiting from Jesus' healing and teaching.

I'm wondering if what they were feeling was similar to what the MAGA followers are feeling today. This sense that somehow they have been shafted and that what they deserve is going to immigrants, outsiders, those who are different or even unsuitable. Or maybe what those people in the synagogue were feeling is like what members of the government of Canada was feeling back in 1911 when they put forward an Order-in-Council banning "any immigrants belonging to the

Negro race, which is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada.”

Unlike all the racist, homophobic and transphobic Executive Orders that have been recently signed by the President of the United States, this Canadian regulation does not appear to have been invoked officially and the ban was not written into the Immigration Act. But that didn't stop Immigration agents from creating many obstacles for immigrants of African descent. For instance, Canadian immigration authorities would often ignore Black inquiries for information or assistance. Railway representatives ensured that African-Americans bound for Canada were charged a full fare for train travel, rather than the reduced settler rate. The Commissioner of Immigration for Western Canada bribed a medical examiner to refuse black immigrants. Racism was alive and well in Canada back in the early 1900's.

<https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/order-in-council-pc-1911-1324>

February is Black History Month and so today I want to share with you some stories of the settlers of African descent who actually made it to Canada. These are stories of settlers who lived and thrived here in Saskatchewan. These are stories of courageous, talented, faith-filled people who came to Canada looking for justice, healing and freedom. The stories themselves come from a website called the [Saskatchewan African Canadian Heritage Museum](#).

The first known person of African descent to be documented in Saskatchewan was a man named Alfred Schmitz Shadd. He came from Ontario. Despite

growing up in relative poverty, Shadd dreamed of becoming a doctor and graduated from Trinity College at the University of Toronto in 1898. To cover the cost of his studies he taught school for a short time which is what brought him to Saskatchewan in 1896. The prairies and the people must have made an impression on him because he returned to the Kinistino area once his studies were completed. His compassion for his patients is legendary. An editorial in the Melfort Moon newspaper states, "No drive was too long; no night too dark; no trail too rough to deter the doctor when the call for assistance came . . . Rich or poor, he made no distinction and nobly he performed his duty."

Dr. Shadd's diverse interests included farming and politics. He served on Town Council, was a member of the School Board and served as Church Warden for All Saints Anglican Church. He was the first President of the Melfort Agricultural Society and was an active member of the Masonic Order. Sadly, Dr. Shadd died of appendicitis at age 45 and he is buried in Melfort, SK.

<https://sachm.org/virtual-museum/category/alfred-schmitz-shadd>

Here's another story, a little closer to home. Willa Reese Bowen immigrated, with her parents, first to Vancouver B.C. in 1908 then to Amber Valley, Alberta. Willa was no stranger to hard work. When she was still at home, she helped with the daily chores, milking cows and gardening. In 1920, she married Noah Dallard and moved to Prelate, Saskatchewan. Together they had four children. As a farmer's wife, Willa participated in the Wheat Pool's special programs for women and attended CCF meetings. "I thought Tommy Douglas was the capital of Canada," she said and laughed. Willa lived a full and satisfying life. Her wish, "to be what God wants me to be . . . because after all it's not what you profess to be,

your actions speak so loud till people don't even hear what you're saying." Willa died in 1988 and is buried at Prelate Cemetery. <https://sachm.org/virtual-museum/category/willa-reese-bowen-dallard-1>

Finally, I want to share the story of Joseph and Mattie Mayes. Joseph Mayes was a community leader. In 1911, he led a group of families to the Canadian prairies, to a place near Maidstone SK. Here, at the age of 54, Joseph Mayes and his wife Mattie established a farming operation and with others in the community built the Shiloh Church. Together Joseph and Mattie raised a family of 10 boys and 3 girls. They used oxen and horse to break up the first 30 acres of land on their homestead. Joseph hewed the logs and built his family a home plastered with lime made from his own lime kiln. His children were taught "honour your father and your mother and to do what was right." Each Sunday, Joseph also taught the community congregation, preaching at Shiloh Church as their Pastor. The picture that you see is three generations of the Mayes family in front of the church that they built. <https://sachm.org/virtual-museum/category/joseph-mayes>

So today as we celebrate the stories of these early settlers let us also celebrate the broad diversity of God's creation. Let us celebrate the amazing people of all backgrounds who immigrated to this country: the doctors, teachers, farmers, midwives, politicians, engineers and civil servants. Let us remember that God's love extends across all boundaries including race, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity. Jesus' ministry went beyond his own Jewish neighbours and family. It was based on God's unconditional love for all creation and we are also called to love all people and to share what we have with everyone, even those who may be different than us. May it be so. Amen.